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BUFFALO BILL IN ARIZONA.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



"HO, MEN UP THERE! COVER THESE MEN WITH YOUR RIFLES!" CRIED THE YOUNG RANCHERO.

Buffalo Bill in Arizona;

OR,

Buckskin Sam's Shadow Trail.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"Great Heavens! It is a woman! and in this wild land alone!"

"Her horse is running away with her—no, she has checked him, and—Ah! she has fallen from her saddle!"

And as the words were uttered, the speaker sunk spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, and with a bound and angry snort, the animal went flying toward the one who had dropped so suddenly upon the ground.

There she lay, limp and motionless, as though dead, while the rider was speeding like the wind to the spot.

It was in the wilds of Arizona, far from habitation, fort, or camp, and in a country over which even brave men cared not to travel.

And yet a woman was there—no, say, rather, a girl, for she was still in her teens, and in spite of the deathly pallor upon her face, was very beautiful.

Her long golden hair had been loosened from its comb, and fell about her like a veil, and the bosom of her dark blue riding habit was stained with blood, flowing from a wound upon which her gloved hands were pressed, as though to still the anguish she suffered.

She lay prone upon the earth, just as she had fallen, stretched out upon a bed of grass, and her head rested upon a bunch of moss, while from her lips were wrung the oft-repeated words:

"Yes, this is death! this is the end that is to be mine!"

Then would follow a moment of silence, and the words would break forth:

"My God! do I deserve this fate?"

Suddenly her ears caught the sound of rapidly approaching hoof-beats. Near her was her own horse, who raised his head in a startled way, as he turned toward the approaching horse and rider.

With a great effort the girl raised herself upon an elbow, and her eyes caught sight of the now rapidly nearing horseman.

Her face, still pale and drawn, took on a look of determination, and, with another effort, she drew from a small holster swung to a belt about her small waist, a revolver.

But—strange! The weapon was turned not toward the horseman, but the muzzle was pointed at her own breast!

"He shall find me dead when he comes, and by my own hand," she said with startling firmness and strength of voice.

Another second and the firm finger would have pulled the trigger; but—

There came a sharp report—a bullet struck the barrel of the little gun whose muzzle then rested against her breast, and the weapon was hurled half a dozen feet away.

The sharp-eyed horseman had seen her act, had understood her intention, and, confident in his aim, had forced his horse suddenly back upon his haunches, thrown his revolver to a level, taken lightning-like sight, and fired the saving shot.

"Good! I have saved her," he cried, while, from her lips, burst the words:

"God help me! I am lost!"

Again she made an effort to rise, but in vain, and with a moan she fell back with her head upon the grass.

A moment more, the rider reined his steed back upon his haunches to a sudden standstill, and, leaping from his saddle, dropped upon one knee by the side of the wounded woman.

Her eyes were closed, and as he saw the red stain upon the front of her dress he cried with sudden dread:

"Good God! did I give her that wound? No, no, no! Surely my aim could not do so cruel a deed as this."

At his words the eyes of the young girl opened wide, and were fixed upon the man, as though to look him through and through.

She started. A slight color tinged the pallidness, and she murmured:

"No! no! Your shot did not wound me. It struck the pistol from my hand, just as I intended to kill myself."

"But why? I am your friend, not a foe," the horseman returned, in an earnest, kindly tone, as he grasped her hand, while a slight shudder swept over his frame as he glanced at the wound, still ebbing the life-blood of the young girl away.

"You are my friend?" she repeated.

"Yes, yes, in truth I am, and I will do all I can for you."

"You can do nothing."

"I may, for I know much of wounds. Let me be your surgeon, for I have a small case of instruments and medicine with me."

"You cannot help me, for I am dying."

"Oh, no, lady; not so, I feel certain."

"I know that I am dying. One smitten by death is given the power to know. I will not live very long."

"I cannot believe it; but, who wounded you—who are you?"

The large eyes met his own now, and, in a firm voice, she asked:

"Who are you, and what are you?"

"I am called Buffalo Bill, the Army Scout," was the quick response.

The answer seemed to have a strange effect upon the young girl.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET UNTOLD.

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

The wounded girl uttered the words as if with surprise, and yet with pleasure.

"My name is William Cody, miss, but I am better known by the name of Buffalo Bill, the scout," was the answer.

"I am glad. I am not afraid of you. I know you too well by reputation."

"I did fear you, for I thought you were—"

She paused, and the scout asked:

"Who?"

"The one who has brought ruin upon my home, and those I love—yes, and has brought me to this, to die here in this wild region, alone, save for you, and you will not desert me, I know; you will clasp my hand as my life fades out?"

"Yes, I will remain by you to the end; but, I cannot bring myself to believe that such as you can die thus."

"Your wound may be a severe one, yet not fatal. I can help you to the ranch to which I am bound, some twenty miles from here."

"What is the name of the ranchero?"

"Manton Marr."

"He is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"When did this happen, for I have a letter in my pocket from him, asking me to visit him upon a most important mission, and I was on my way to his ranch."

"He is dead," and the lips of the girl quivered.

"When did he die?"

"Last night, or rather before dawn this morning."

"Ah! there has been foul play there, then, a raid of outlaws, or of Indians, and—"

"It was a raid of demons, and I alone escaped, for I am—"

She stopped suddenly, for the scout had sprung to his feet in some alarm.

At first she supposed that her words had been the cause; then she saw that he was listening attentively to some sound.

She also heard it and cried:

"They are coming! Save yourself, sir, for they can do me no harm now."

Buffalo Bill glanced quickly about him, and his eyes fell upon a clump of trees on a knoll not far from him.

It was a good position to defend against odds, and a sheltered retreat for the wounded girl.

In an instant he had raised her gently in his arms, and as tenderly as possible bore her to the little timber motte.

A call to his horse had caused him to follow his master, and taking a blanket from the saddle, the scout spread it upon the ground and placed the slender form upon it.

"I will get your horse, miss, and bring him here, and then go to meet whoever is coming. If they are foes, they must fight; if friends, I shall be glad, for your sake."

"You are very brave, and so good to me! But, I have not told you my secret, and I wish you to know it, though I would not tell it to another living being."

"I will gladly hear it when I return, and if you have been cruelly wronged, as I believe, I will mercilessly avenge you; I swear it!"

Buffalo Bill evidently was deeply moved at the suffering of the unfortunate and beautiful girl.

"If you will avenge me and mine—and you have sworn to do so—I will rest content in my grave," was the low reply, and the scout felt that she indeed must have suffered cruelly, for lips like hers, and almost pressed with the seal of death, to wish for revenge.

Quickly he walked off, and soon returned with her horse, which he hitched near her.

"Will you hear my secret now?"

"Not now, for I must head off those who are coming; I wish no death struggle here."

"I saw them cross yonder ridge a quarter of an hour ago, and they must soon come into sight. I will go out and meet them."

"But if they should be my foes?"

"I will be glad if they are," was the stern reply.

"But, they are many?"

"How many?"

"A fatal number—thirteen!"

"I have had to face even greater odds than that, miss."

"But, the one who leads them is a fiend incarnate, yet daring, desperate, and—"

"So much the better reason his career be cut short."

"No, no! Do not kill him if you can avoid it, for I must see him face to face; I must know—"

The scout interrupted her suddenly.

"They will soon be over that ridge, and I must meet them."

"You will come back to me?" and the voice and look were pleading.

"Indeed I will. I could never desert you—no, no! your suffering appeals to the inmost depths of my nature," and the great plainsman spoke with deepest feeling.

"I believe in you; I trust you," and she raised her hand. Buffalo Bill giving it a gentle pressure, turned and leaped into his saddle.

Off he dashed at a swinging gallop, for the top of the ridge several hundred yards away, and as he reached the summit his horse was reined back, for near at hand was a party of horsemen.

A glance was sufficient to show him that he had every reason to fear them.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK BROTHERHOOD.

The sight that met Buffalo Bill's eyes as he appeared upon the ridge was enough to startle any one.

He was face to face with a dozen or more black-masked men.

They were white men, apparently. Their faces were wholly invisible, and even their hands were concealed by black gauntlet gloves.

They were dressed, likewise, in deep black, from head to foot, and their horses were all of a sable hue!

Buffalo Bill belonged further up in the northwest, and was a stranger to the geography of that section.

He had heard up at headquarters that the country into which he had been sent upon a special mission was suffering under the curse of a band of daring outlaws, who made every man, and woman, too, their game and prey.

Ranches were raided by them, wagon trains attacked, cattle run off, coaches and travelers held up, and yet the country could not be freed from this terrible bane.

The outlaws were wholly unknown, it was said, to all. Thirteen in number they were; yet, though time and again it was asserted that one of the band had been shot from his saddle, and whether dead or wounded, had been carried off by his comrades, when the black brigade was next seen there were, as before, the thirteen men in the saddle.

This caused people to dread them the more, as the fatal and fated thirteen, who, from their dress, were called the Black Brotherhood.

If deeds of lawlessness were committed, always it was discovered that the brand of the brotherhood was left behind, to show whose red work it was.

This "brand," as it was called, was in reality a small black flag, with skull and crossbones, stuck up on the scene, whether it was death they left behind them, or ruin and ashes.

From whence they came, or whither they went—who, or what they were, no one could say or surmise. They were wont to appear suddenly when least expected, do their work of rapine and death, then disappear as suddenly, yet never leaving a trail!

Literally, they were Trailless Terrors! No trail could be found, either of their going or coming!

All these stories, and many more, had Buffalo Bill heard of this remarkable and mysterious Black Brotherhood; but it was a surprise to him one day, when on duty as Chief of Scouts at Fort Fetterman, to receive a letter asking him to visit the scene of operations of the brotherhood, and to come upon a special and important mission, which would be explained to him upon his arrival.

Going to the colonel with this letter, to his yet greater surprise that officer told him that he had just received a letter from the department commander, ordering the colonel to detail his Chief of Scouts for secret service in Arizona, the exact nature of which would be explained to him by one to whom he had orders to report upon his arrival there.

Still further: he was to go alone, and start at once.

Obedying orders promptly, Buffalo Bill had arrived within a score of miles of his destination, to suddenly come upon the wounded girl, as has been recorded; and now, as he reached the top of the ridge, it was to find himself face to face with a band of horsemen whom a glance showed him could be no other than the Black Brotherhood.

The black cohort were coming on up the trail, and not three hundred yards distant from him!

To see the danger was to instantly act. His thoughts ran about as follows:

"Men with masked faces must be criminals, and that sable troop answers the description of the ruthless Black Brotherhood of whom I have heard so much.

"If they are the outlaw thirteen, then shooting is too good for them, and as they are on the trail the girl came, and she said enough to show that great wrong had been done by some one, they must be her foes and now are pursuing her.

"If they go right on they will find her, and then God help her, dying as she may be, though I hope it is not so extreme as that.

"Now, mounted on my good Flyaway, here, I fear no horse that can pursue me, and I can give some of the thirteen a very bad reminder of law and order with my ever reliable repeating rifle.

"But, first, I must turn them away from that girl, and to do so, must make them very anxious to catch me.

"Night is but an hour or so away, and eluding them, I can return to her, and she can tell me where help can be nearest found."

Thus had Buffalo Bill mused, or reasoned, and having made up his mind, he coolly rode into full view of the coming horsemen, for they had not yet seen him, and throwing his rifle to his shoulder, called out:

"Halt! or I shall order my men to fire on you!

"Hands up, each one of you!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST SHOT.

The sable thirteen drew rein as one man, at the loud, stern order.

They beheld confronting them a single horseman.

Who else he might have beyond the ridge they of course did not know; but they obeyed his command and halted.

They did not, however, raise their hands above their heads.

The rider who thus barred their way they looked upon with surprise, commingled with admiration. A finer picture of a horse and man they had never beheld.

The horse was a phenomenal animal in beauty and superb equine points that tell of speed, endurance, and rare intelligence.

The man was a phenomenal one in the perfection of manhood, handsome-faced, daring, determined, and of indomitable will, unless all signs failed.

The accoutrements of the horse were handsome, and the dress of the rider was a buckskin suit, broad-brimmed sombrero, and top boots.

He held, thrown gracefully across one arm, a repeating rifle, and there he sat, one to thirteen, yet with unflinching men.

Who was he? what was he? and what could it mean for the Black Brotherhood to be challenged by one man? Assuredly he could not be alone!

Thus full a minute passed, and a minute of such suspense is terrible.

The scout said no more, gave no other command; but actions spoke louder than words.

His actions were the raising of his rifle to his shoulder.

At that distance not one of the Black Brotherhood could tell at whom the death-tube was aimed; he surely was covering one of them—but which one?

Would his aim be fatal? Would his rifle carry a killing bullet at that distance? Would he fire to kill, or only to frighten them?

All these thoughts flashed through their minds like lightning.

The scout did not hesitate long, for with that poor, wounded girl lying back in the little clump of timber, time was indeed precious.

Up went his rifle, and along the barrel catching the sights ran his piercing eye, bright as a diamond.

The thirteen had halted as they were traveling—in single file.

The leader must be in advance, but the rescuer recalled the words of the wounded girl: She must see him—the leader—face to face alive.

So, instead of aiming at the man in the lead, he would take the last one in the line—the thirteenth!

A rather longer aim was taken than was Buffalo Bill's wont, for he wished to be sure.

At last came the touch on the trigger, the burst of smoke and flame, and the report.

Buffalo Bill had sent his shot of defiance, warning, and vengeance!

CHAPTER V.

A CRY OF TRIUMPH.

The shot was followed by a wild commotion among the Brotherhood, for the rear man, the thirteenth in the line, fell backward in his saddle, and a bound of his horse threw him to the ground, where he lay in a heap, motionless.

The others at once began to wheel in line, as if to charge the enemy, it seemed, but evidently expecting that there would be other shots from the single rider's comrades.

But Buffalo Bill knew his weakness as well as his strength. He must not allow those men to come up the hill and then go on and discover the wounded girl; so, the intrepid plainsman made a bold move toward the Black Brotherhood, as though to charge them, and with a daring which must cause them to feel that he had others to back him.

He advanced but a few paces; then he suddenly halted and again raised his rifle.

The outlaw band swerved wildly at this, for they had had too fatal a proof of the deadly aim of their wonderfully daring foe.

"Fire!" the command was shouted, as the men swung about uneasily, and as the order was obeyed the scout's rifle also again spoke.

A dozen rifles flashed, and all but one were aimed at Buffalo Bill.

The latter did not flinch at the fire, and took big chances. His keen eyes already had taken a look, through his glass, at the weapons of his foes, and he discovered that they were armed with carbines only.

This told him that they carried no repeating rifles, and the gauge of range of their weapons he set down as about the distance he was from them.

He could, therefore, take the risk of the fire.

As it was, their bullets, under their quite aimless and hurried fire, flew wild, while a second one of their number dropped from his saddle!

Each man looked exactly alike, as to dress and horse, and Buffalo Bill, therefore, was unable to pick out the leader.

Taking advantage of the dismay into which the men were thrown, he at once sent a third shot on its way.

This brought down a horse, and the rider seemed to have a hard fall, as the horse reared and fell backward with him.

"Good God! that man will pick us off, one by one. Charge him!" was the peremptory order.

Having gained the point he purposed—that they would pursue him—Buffalo Bill started along the ridge in flight, not riding upon the summit, where he could be outlined against the sky, and so be a fair target, but kept the hill as a back-ground.

Two of the men had stayed to pick up their dead and strap them upon their saddles, and also to strip the fallen animal of his equipments, and, at the same time, aid the rider to a mount behind one of them.

The rest of the command had obeyed the order to charge, and were riding at full speed up and along the hill.

Away sped Buffalo Bill, his horse in a gallop and his rifle ready.

He would not ride at full speed, to show what his horse could do, for he wished to lure all in pursuit of him, to get them away from the place where lay the wounded girl.

As they came on the outlaws halted suddenly, and once more the carbines rang out.

The scout, without halting, fired as they did.

Their shots were again wild, and the lone rider still kept his saddle, while his shot brought down one of the sable horses.

"Too bad! too bad! He has killed two men and two horses as well! We must catch that man.

"Come on! Every man of you follow!"

Buffalo Bill heard the words as he started on more rapidly, with a word to his good horse.

But, suddenly arose a wild yell of triumph from the Black Brotherhood, and following came the cry:

"See! his horse is wounded!"

"We have got him now!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATAL THIRTEEN.

The sight of Buffalo Bill's horse going at a gallop, but limping badly, was a joy to the outlaws.

They felt sure of their game, and dashed forward, seven in number now, leaving the others to come at will.

Seven of the brotherhood were certainly far more than a match for the one man, they thought, though thus far they had not proven themselves even his equal.

Now his horse was wounded; he was riding along the ridge toward a plain, wide and barren, and where there could be no escape for him.

Far across this plain the mountains loomed into view, but the fleeing horseman could not reach one-fourth the distance to them with a mount going almost upon three legs. Their game would fall an easy prey to them!

With this belief the Horsemen in Black rode rapidly on in pursuit; they began to gain upon him!

Suddenly, there came the steep descent from the ridge, and, as the scout came to it, he wheeled in his saddle and sent another shot at his pursuers.

This shot was returned as they rode on at a gallop. Bullets struck about Buffalo Bill, yet he was untouched.

But the fourth shot of the daring rifleman had found its mark, for a third man had thrown his arms above his head, waved them wildly, and then had toppled head downward to the ground.

Buffalo Bill saw no more, as he at once disappeared over the edge of the ridge.

"You are a good one, Flyaway, to play lame, but you are not so any longer," remarked the rider, and he sprung from his saddle to go on foot down the steep descent from the crest.

As he did so he patted Flyaway affectionately on the shoulder, and the well-trained animal had started off without the slightest limp.

"We fooled them well, horse-pard. They thought you had been wounded and so believed you, and I would soon be in their grip; but, I guess not; though we must still deceive them when they come into sight again.

"This is a rough trail, down-grade, and no mistake, but so long as they will follow, and be drawn from the trail where that poor girl is, we won't care.

"Come! we must not let them get too near us, for some of their shots will hit us by accident yet."

With this the scout went rapidly down the steep incline, the horse following with no sign of lameness.

Here and there rocks and trees concealed the two, so that they were not visible to their pursuers at first, when they reached the descent; but, soon their game was discovered and the Men in Black pushed on, yet slowly, fearing to throw their horses down the steep decline.

Reaching the heart of a canyon, into which the trail ran, Buffalo Bill disappeared from view, but his pursuers knew that he had to continue on, with no hiding place, and thus out into the open plain, from whence escape, with a lame horse, was impossible.

With this belief, and an hour yet of sunset, they took no risks of a fall, but descended the steep trail at a moderate gait.

Reaching the bottom of the trail, Buffalo Bill found there a small stream, at which he watered his horse and filled his

canteens, then reloaded the empty chambers of his repeating rifle.

Strangely cool he was and apparently in no hurry, but his quick eye had detected that the canyon was winding, and had very crooked turns in it, so he knew he could thus avoid shots, though the outlaws had drawn much nearer to him.

Starting on his way he caught a glimpse of the pursuers, and at once a word to his horse caused the thoroughly trained creature to limp badly again.

Seemingly sure of their prey now, the outlaws halted to water their horses.

At last Buffalo Bill left the mouth of the canyon and rode out upon the open plain.

There was a slight rise ahead of him, just out of range of their carbines, and toward this he rode at a gallop.

Halting upon this rise, he waited for his pursuers to come into view.

Minutes passed and they did not appear.

Could this mean that they had given up the chase.

This he did not believe, so he waited on.

At last, as he was beginning to fear that they had returned to the trail over the ridge and would discover the wounded girl, he saw them appear in sight.

And then, strong-nerved as Buffalo Bill certainly was, devoid of all superstition, he started and gazed in something of awe at what he beheld.

And no wonder was it that he did so, for the sight that met his vision would have appalled most men.

There, in full view, were the Black Brotherhood in pursuit, and they were once more thirteen horsemen!

Buffalo Bill had seen the men and horses fall at his fire. He knew his aim was deadly; and where he had expected to see ten men in pursuit, he now beheld the full band of thirteen Horsemen in Black!

Drawing his horse to a halt, and wheeling in his saddle, Buffalo Bill said in a mystified way: "I killed three of the Thirteen Men in Black, and yet there come thirteen horsemen on my trail!"

"What does it, can it, mean?"

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

It is speaking mildly to say that Buffalo Bill was amazed at what he beheld.

He had counted thirteen horsemen in the Black Brotherhood band.

Out of this number no more no less, as he was assured, in his own mind, he had killed three, or at least had fired upon that many, seen them drop from their saddles at his fire, and certainly he had no reason for doubting the deadliness of his aim.

And again, he had brought down two of the thirteen horses; but now, he saw in pursuit of him, no less than thirteen horses, and upon the back of each animal was a rider!

He took his field glass and leveled it upon the horsemen, to see that the three riders whose presence he could not account for were not dummies.

No, they were live men, and masked, as his glass revealed.

Then there were two live horses in place of those he had shot.

The band was still the fatal thirteen, and he recalled that that number always constituted the active members of the Black Brotherhood.

The thirteen, too, were in pursuit of him, which fact he fully realized; and more: they came on in an easy gallop, as though sure of their prey.

"It will simply be a life more or less to remain here and pick them off, and though I abhor killing a man, these scoundrels richly deserve death.

"But, I will push on, for in this crooked canyon I can gain on them, and get well out of range of their rifles, though mine would still readily reach them.

"No, I'll ride rapidly, get a long start,

lose them in the darkness upon the plain, and then sweep around and get back to that poor girl again. That is my plain duty."

So saying, the hunted scout sent his horse off on a run, as soon as he got around a bend in the canyon, and had the outlaws observed him they would have marveled greatly that the lameness of the animal was so suddenly absent.

But, they did not see him, on account of the bends in the canyon, and only upon coming out upon the open plain did they discover the horseman well out of the range of their rifles.

He was pushing along for the distant mountains, and night was coming on, so if they did not overtake him quickly, he would elude them in the darkness.

The scout's horse, they now remarked, still went lame, but, hard pushed, he must break down, they felt certain.

Pressing in line, the Sable Thirteen went dashing along to push the supposed lame horse to the best speed he could make, and thus break him down the sooner.

But, the crippled beast still sped on, and it seemed that the pursuers gained but slowly, if at all.

At last the night shadows began to fall; the scout and his steed looked like grim spectres in the distance, until, at last, they faded altogether from sight.

Confident that the scout must hold on to the mountains, entering them by a well known gap, the pursuers pushed on, yet hoping to come up with the lame steed before night fully settled down.

But the solitary rider held his way, though he allowed the thirteen to gain upon him, yet not enough to bring him once more under their fire.

Gradually the night came on and the keen eyes of the scout could yet discern the band, though, being alone, he was hardly visible to them.

Wheeling his horse about so as to face them, he gave his defiant war cry; that defiance was enforced by the rattle of his sixteen shots from the chambered rifle, taking no particular aim, but letting the bullets find a target at chance.

A commotion among the band followed, and in the glare of his fire the horseman disappeared like a spectre.

Making a flank movement, as he rode, he was not long in getting around to the trail he had deserted, and hoped that he was well in advance of his foes, should they have turned about after his fire.

That he was on the right trail he soon discovered, for the canyon opened before him, and, leaving it to his horse to find the way, he held on at a canter.

Reaching the ridge, he went up out of the canyon, and at last saw a dark object ahead.

It was in the trail he had passed over, and a closer approach told him that it was one of the two horses he had shot.

Dismounting, he found that the animal had been stripped of his saddle and bridle; but the rider was not there, and when he came to the other dead animal no human body was visible: the dead outlaws, if he had killed them, were not to be seen.

With some anxiety about the wounded girl he had left in the little grove, he rode rapidly on, just as the moon began to rise.

Coming in sight of the timber, he approached cautiously, for if the outlaws could produce men so quickly to replace those who had been shot, they could find others to lie in ambush for him in the timber, feeling certain, should he escape those pursuing him, he could double on them and would surely return to the wounded woman.

Just where the girl had been left the trail passed by, and had the Black Brotherhood been pursuing her, when he barred their way, Buffalo Bill felt assured that some one would have been sent on in chase of her.

So there was reason for caution in ap-

proaching the grove; and dismounting, the scout made his way on foot.

At last the grove was reached, entered, and a quick search revealed that the wounded girl was not there.

CHAPTER VIII. THE BLACK FLAG.

"Gone!"

The exclamation came from the lips as though he was amazed at the disappearance of the girl.

With the thirteen completed by the reserves who must have come up, and joined the band, Buffalo Bill had hoped that none were left to send on after the girl.

But it seemed as though there had been more of them, for the wounded, perhaps dying girl, was surely not where he had left her.

A quick search for her horse showed that he was not at the tree where the scout had hitched him.

Had she recovered her strength sufficiently to mount and fly? Had she heard the firing, and thus gained energy to rise and mount her horse?

The scout remembered that he had hitched the horse to a swinging limb, as high up as he could reach, and certainly the maiden, who was not very tall, could not have unfastened the rein.

Some one had done it for her, beyond all doubt, but who was that some one?

The Black Brotherhood, of course!

By rapid riding, after discovering that he had escaped them in the darkness, Buffalo Bill knew it was possible for them to retrace the trail, to find the maiden and to carry her off with them.

He stood in silent and painful meditation, gazing down upon the ground where he had left her.

His large serape, which he had spread for her to lie upon, was also gone!

"If they have moved her, it will kill her, for surely brutes who would shoot at a woman would show her no mercy even when wounded.

"But where have they taken her? and who is she? and why was she shot?"

"And more: what was the secret she did not have time to make known to me, and who were those whom the outlaws had raided?"

"I must and will find out. That must be my mission, now."

So the scout had mused, as he stood there in the timber, the moonlight streaming through the foliage upon him.

Knowing that he could do nothing until daylight, and feeling that both his horse and himself needed rest, he went to where the patient animal awaited him, and mounting, rode off in search of a retired camping place.

He was not long in finding a good spot, where water, wood, and grass—three stern necessities to the wild west wayfarer—were in abundance. These were quickly put to use; his horse was watered and staked out; sticks were gathered and a fire kindled; then he cooked his own supper of coffee, bacon, and crackers.

He missed his serape, but he had other covering, and knowing that his horse would warn him of danger by a neigh, he lay down to rest, and, in spite of being troubled about the strange disappearance of the girl, he passed into sleep at once.

The horse gave no warning; the night passed quietly; and the Wilderness Pathfinder awoke greatly refreshed by his undisturbed sleep and rest.

His horse, also, had had a good rest and plenty of grass; so both were ready for the day's work.

Breakfast was soon had, and mounting, Buffalo Bill started back to the grove where he had left the wounded girl, to find out, if possible, while the trail was yet fresh, just what had become of her.

To the timber he rode, and dismounting began to look for signs.

There were his own trails, where he had entered the grove, the evening before, but no others, save that of the girl's horse.

But, he made a discovery which set him to thinking. He found that which, he could swear, was not there when he visited the timber the night before!

That discovery was a small black flag, with skull and crossbones in white, upon a tiny staff, which was stuck in the ground just where he had placed the wounded young woman; and, upon the flag was pinned a slip of paper.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WARNING IN RED.

"This has been placed here since I left the spot, last night. Some of those fellows must have an eye on me," decided the scout, as he took up the little flag and unpinned the slip of paper.

It was but a few lines he read, written in red pencil, as though to the more impress what was said. It read:

"You are known, and you are now warned that you must leave this country at once, or your doom will be sure and terrible.

"The Black Brotherhood, like the Rattlesnake, warn before they strike.

"Disregard this warning and you will receive the brand of

"The Black Brotherhood."

Buffalo Bill smiled. He had received so many warnings in his lifetime, had been threatened with death so often, that warnings and threats made no further impression upon him than to render him more cautious, though his caution was of a kind that did not show even to his intimates and pards.

He pinned the paper back upon the flag, rolled the latter about the little staff, and put it in his saddle bags.

"This must surely be intended for me, though no name is given. But I really do not believe they know me, because I was a long distance from them all the time, and they could not recognize me unless one of them happens to know me well.

"Perhaps that poor girl told who I was.

"Well, thinking is not acting, so I must get to work and see what the trail tells me."

With this the expert in wood-craft began to "read the signs" that a true borderman knows as an open book.

It was not very long before he began to feel mystified. The fact was that he could only find a few trails leading to and from the timber.

Two of those trails were made by the horse of the wounded girl and his own, when he first went there for shelter.

Another trail was his own, in leaving the timber when he went to head off the coming outlaws, and the fourth that of his last returns to the grove.

These were all!

Search as he might, he could not find the trail left by the girl's horse in leaving the spot; nor was there the track of a man or other horse than that he could account for, to be found anywhere about the timber!

This was a strange thing for the scout to ponder over, for, certainly, the wounded girl was gone, there was no trace of her horse, nor of his serape, yet the little black flag and its red warning were proof that the outlaws had been there.

But, how had they come and gone and left no trace?

That was what mystified Buffalo Bill.

The more he thought over the situation the more was he mystified; but, at length, finding both thought and search useless, he remounted his horse, determined to continue on his way, but, as preliminary to this, he decided to ride to the spot where he had just met the band.

This he did; but the earth was hard there, and no trace of hoof print could be detected.

Thoroughly disappointed, Buffalo Bill muttered:

"They have their horses shod in some peculiar way to keep from leaving trails. All the same, I will yet find them, and know the fate of that poor girl. I have given my vow to her to avenge her wrongs, and that vow must be redeemed.

"Now to go on to the ranch of Manton Marr, and see if it can really be true, as she told me, that he is dead and his home a ruin.

"If so, my duty is plain; for though I came too late to save, I can avenge."

With this determined utterance Buffalo Bill rode on his way, taking the trail he had been following the afternoon before, where the wounded maiden so unexpectedly crossed his path.

CHAPTER X.

A LIFE CLAIM.

There was no finer ranch in the Arizona country than that of Manton Marr.

The owner had been a miner, it was said; he had struck it rich, and had started homeward, carrying his treasure with him, when he had come upon the country under the shadow of the San Francisco range, and within easy ride of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado Mountains, the greatest of Nature's mighty upheavals in all that rugged region.

Impressed by the marvels of grandeur about him, and charmed with the country around his lone night camp, the miner had said then and there he would remain and make his home.

The others of the party had gone on their way, but he had remained.

He had first buried his gold, hidden it most securely, save so much as he needed for his work, and going down toward the New Mexico line, had hired a number of Mexicans, and taken them back to his new abiding place.

Then he had set to work to build his home—a fine cabin and outbuildings, and all else to make him comfortable.

Cattle were purchased in Texas and driven to Overlook Ranch, as he named it, and half a dozen cowboys were employed to look after them.

Then Manton Marr had gone to Tennessee to bring his family to their new home.

In Tennessee he had known much of misfortune and sorrow; he had left there a poor man, to seek his fortune in western mines.

He had been successful, and returned to his old home to get those he loved to go back with him to the new abiding place in Arizona.

It had been a long, hard journey, but, at last, the wagon train had arrived one afternoon at Overlook Ranch, and his devoted wife and daughter had been glad to behold their new and novel home.

The wagon train had been well laden with furniture, supplies, and all that the miner-rancher knew would be needed, and, though Mrs. Marr and Helen had discovered that the nearest neighbor was far away, they seemed content to live a life of solitude.

"Here we are safe, Helen, for the shadow will not follow us.

"I am content," Mrs. Marr had said upon arriving at the new haven—to her a haven of repose.

"Yes, mother, father will be happy here, and we need not live in deadly fear any more.

"We can soon make our new home a happy one, and I will learn to be a real frontier girl, in a very short while," the young girl had averred.

With the furniture brought, and willing hands to make all bright and cheery, Overlook Ranch very soon took on a most cheerful appearance.

Manton Marr seemed content in looking after his horses and cattle, cultivating a garden, and finding fish and game for his table, while his good wife, with the aid of a negro man and woman, who had followed their fortunes to the

Arizona wilds, made all about the ranch delightfully inviting.

Helen soon learned to throw a lariat, and being already a fine horsewoman and good shot, she would accompany her father upon hunting trips, and seemed to revel in the wild life.

Several raids of Indians had been beaten off by the rancher and his people, and all began to feel that the worst was over, when other settlers came to find homes in the same fine country, and located a dozen miles from Overlook.

Then followed a stage line, running on a trail a dozen miles away, and emigrant trains began to travel the same way, while miners in the mountain were wont to send their hard-earned gold eastward over the same trails.

These chances of getting the gold of others outlaws were not long in finding out, and it was now made apparent that a band known as the Black Brotherhood were well informed as to where to strike a coach, wagon train, or traveller, and thus secure a rich haul of booty.

In vain did the settlers get the cowboys from their ranches together, and attempt to hunt down the marauders. The bandits could never be found after one of their lawless raids, nor could they be tracked to their retreats.

Soldiers had been sent from Fort Wingate to protect the settlers and trails, but, when the mounted detachments were there on the ground, no marauders were ever seen.

The stage company had sent men to hunt them, but without result.

The work of lawlessness still went on, and no clue could be found to the daring waylayers.

One of the new arrivals in the country, a young man, who with his sister had established a ranch a score of miles from Overlook, had been most persistent and daring in his hunt for the mountain miscreants, and the result was that twice had his home been raided, booty taken, and a number of times his horses and cattle had been stolen.

At last, he organized a band of rangers, from the cowboys of the different ranches, yet still the Black Brotherhood continued their marauding, and could not be driven off or caught in the toils.

In despair at their inability to wipe out the band Manton Marr had decided to call upon one to aid him upon whom he had a strong claim.

So he at once wrote to this man, telling him the story, and begging his aid, while he also addressed other letters to army officers in the west whom he well knew.

The man upon whom he had a claim was Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

The claim that Manton Marr had upon Buffalo Bill was one of life.

In the mines, one night, when in the discharge of his duty, Buffalo Bill would have been killed by a gang of desperadoes, and where no man had dared to take his part, Manton Marr had stepped forward, taking all chances, and by his determined stand and deadly aim had quickly shown that the scout was by no means without a friend in need.

Buffalo Bill appreciated all that the brave miner had done in his behalf, and that he had drawn upon himself the enmity of a certain few of the worst characters in the mines, that kept his life continually in danger.

"Remember I am ever your friend, Mr. Marr, and if I can ever serve you, command me to the full extent of my power to do so," Buffalo Bill had said.

That he meant all he uttered was proven when, nearly two years after, a letter came to him from his friend from Arizona, which read:

"I struck it rich beyond my brightest hopes, and established a home for my

family under the shadow of the San Francisco Mountains, down here in Arizona.

"For reasons I cannot now explain, I do not care to go east again to live, so I hid my gold here, and have a fine ranch, with comfortable quarters, while my wife and daughter are with me.

"Neighbors are few and far between, but there are coaches, wagon trains, travellers, and settlers enough to cause the lawless element to develope, and a band of outlaws, known by the two names of the Fatal Thirteen and the Black Brotherhood, has robbed, raided, and killed, until life is a misery here.

"We, that is the respectable element, are victims; but, try as we may, we can get no clue to the retreat of these inhuman scourges, or run them down, and knowing your record, my dear friend Cody—remembering the deeds you have accomplished, and recalling your request to me to call upon you, if ever you could help me, I now write to you, asking you to come to me, to look over the field, and decide if you cannot wipe these wretches off of the face of our fair land.

"I also write your commandant at the fort, and other officers whom I know, and I feel that, in calling upon you for your services, I am doing the right thing to end this bitter curse upon us.

"Come to my home, Overlook Ranch, in the old Mormon Valley, under the shadow of the San Francisco Mountains.

"I need give no further directions to you.

"Should you come with your scouts to act at once, you know best, or whether to first come alone to look over the field.

"Whatever your decision you will be welcome.

"Hoping for your coming soon, I am, as ever, Your friend,

"Manton Marr."

This was the letter, added to the reports to the commanding officer of the nearest post, where Buffalo Bill was Chief of Army Scouts, which started him on the trail that led to the meeting of the wounded girl, flying from her foes, and the sharp action with the Fatal Thirteen.

"I have begun both well and badly, for I have met the Black Brotherhood with the advantage on my side, yet have lost that poor girl, for whom I feel the deepest sympathy.

"Now to go to Overlook Ranch and see just what is before me."

From the little he had learned from the maiden he could not tell just what had happened, nor did he then know who she really was.

Yet he had learned enough to know that Manton Marr had not exaggerated the need of help against the Black Brotherhood, and that outlaws who would add to their other crimes that of shooting a woman were indeed a band of miscreants to hunt to the bitter end, to run down until brought under the shadow of the gallows.

To such a pathfinder as Buffalo Bill the directions given by Manton Marr, meagre as they were, were sufficient. The scout had gone on unerringly, guided by the lay of the land and the almost phenomenal instinct which he possessed.

He was nearing his journey's end now, so, unheeding the warning of the Black Brotherhood flag left for him, he went on his way, his eyes on the watch, his ears open for every sound, and riding slowly and cautiously, avoiding all spots likely to furnish a good ambush for a foe.

The San Francisco Mountains towered above him as he drew nearer their base; the sun sunk behind the horizon, and yet he rode on until the moon arose to light his way.

"Overlook Ranch cannot be far away from here," he decided, and as he coined the words he quickly drew rein, for he had suddenly ridden upon a strange scene.

CHAPTER XII.

REVEALED BY THE MOONLIGHT.

The sight which caused Buffalo Bill to halt so suddenly was a strange one.

He had been riding through a canyon, thickly grown with timber, and was nearing the end, for he could see out upon a moonlit valley beyond, when he beheld a man standing in the full light of the moon.

He was tall, clad in frontier garb, and the moonlight revealed a revolver thrust in his belt and a rifle leaning against the tree behind him.

The pose of the man was striking, for he leant one hand upon a pick, with which he had been digging, while the other hand was held out, the palm open, as though in pleading. With face upturned and eyes riveted upon the moon, he was talking as though addressing it.

"The man must be demented, for he is talking to the moon, and at his feet is an open grave, that is certain," said Buffalo Bill, as he sat upon his horse in the shadow of the timber, and gazed upon the strange scene, not more than three hundred feet from him.

A spade stuck in the open grave, and the moon's rays revealed the striking picture almost as clearly as the sunlight could have done.

Drawing slowly nearer, and dismounting, Buffalo Bill left his horse standing unfastened, and gained a position from whence he could more distinctly see the man.

The latter had not heard the clink of the iron-shod hoofs over the canyon trail, seemingly too much absorbed in his own occupation to hear, see, or heed aught else.

His face appeared strangely white in the moonlight; his hair was long; he wore a beard; and his lips moved as he muttered aloud words which the scout could not catch.

The large slouch hat was turned up in front, so that the light fell full upon his face, and Buffalo Bill said earnestly, as he passed on out of the timber:

"My God! it is Manton Marr! Can his sorrows have driven him to insanity?"

A few moments the scout stood, undecided what to do to make himself known to the man whom he had come so far to see, and whom he now found had been crazed by his sufferings, when suddenly there came the cracking of a stick, as though under the weight of a foot.

The scout started, though the man did not appear to hear the sound, but kept on with his musing aloud and gazing at the moon.

But, Buffalo Bill's eyes were now upon the spot from whence the sound had come. Some man was there, for a deer, or bear, or panther would not have approached that near a human being.

He had not long to wait. In the semi-darkness beneath the tree behind Manton Marr the shadowy form of a man appeared, and the watcher saw the white face, the slouch hat, the border garb, top boots and all, and that the hands grasped a rifle.

Who was he and what was his intention?

Buffalo Bill's rifle was slung to his saddle horn, where he had left it when he came forward on foot; but he had his revolvers, and one of these he quickly drew.

To him the movements of the shadowy form indicated an evil purpose.

He saw the man reach forth and take hold of the rifle leaning against the tree.

A glance at it seemed to satisfy the prowler, for it was quickly replaced, and the man stepped a few feet closer to Manton Marr.

The latter still stood with upturned face, his lips moving as he addressed his words to the moon.

What those words were Buffalo Bill could not catch, though he bent his ears to do so.

A call, a word from the scout would have warned the grave digger, but Buffalo Bill was fearful to call out, as then the prowler might escape and the alarm might give the rancher a shock, in his condition of mind.

He therefore decided to await developments, and act as circumstances demanded; so he devoted his attention to the man in the shadow of the tree.

Suddenly there came the distinct and rapid clatter of approaching hoofs.

Manton Marr did not hear, or hearing heed them, but the other, on the instant, threw his rifle to his shoulder and pulled trigger, his aim being at Manton Marr!

But, Buffalo Bill had acted even more quickly, and his revolver flashed, too.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCOUT'S CHASE.

The sound of coming hoofs had taken Buffalo Bill somewhat by surprise.

The horse that made them was yet some distance away, yet coming along the trail through the canyon, the way that Buffalo Bill had come.

The sound had also startled the stranger beneath the shadow of the trees, but the man by the grave still kept his pleading attitude, still talked to the moon.

The scout was none too alert, for, as we have seen, the rifle of the man was rising to a level, and the muzzle was pointed toward Manton Marr.

In the twinkling of an eye it came to the watcher that he could save the rancher, yet not have to kill his intended slayer. Then—

It was a quick aim, a touch of the trigger, and a sharp report—but a second in advance of the shot of the intended assassin.

That second was enough, however, for it destroyed the slayer's aim, and the hand that grasped the barrel of the leveled rifle had dropped uselessly to his side, as the revolver bullet had torn its way through it.

The crack of the rifle and revolver almost mingled, but the man with the rifle, uttering a cry of commingled terror and pain, as his weapon dropped to the ground, leaped back into the timber.

Buffalo Bill had his eye upon him, however, and he followed with the speed of a deer.

Reaching the place where he had stood, the scout lost sight of him in the darkness of the timber, but heard him tearing along through the woods.

He wished to take his man alive, so pursued for several hundred yards, when he came out suddenly into an open space.

The moonlight revealed the fugitive to him at once, but it likewise revealed a short distance from the pursued man a horse staked out and saddled.

"Halt!"

The shout of the scout was unheeded.

"Halt, or I will kill you!"

The man gave a backward glance, stooped as he ran, and pulled up the stake which held the horse.

Another moment and he was in his saddle.

The pursuer halted, raised his revolver, and as the horse darted off the scout fired.

A snort of pain and fright from the animal showed that he had been hit, but went on in his flight.

Again and again the scout fired, to bring down either horse or rider, but the distance was too great, and Buffalo Bill beheld the horseman disappear in a dense growth of timber some three hundred yards away.

"He has escaped me!"

"Now to the hoofs that I heard and to find poor Manton Marr," and with this the scout started back at a run to the spot where he had seen the ranchero digging a grave.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECOND WARNING.

When Buffalo Bill reached the spot which had so nearly proven fatal to the

ranchero, all was as quiet as the grave that lay open before his eyes.

The man whose life he had saved was gone!

He felt that he had fired in time to save him from the assassin's bullet, and yet he feared that he might not have done so, and, consequently, was quite anxious to know the truth.

But Manton Marr was not to be seen.

Listening, Buffalo Bill did not hear a sound.

The hoof falls had ceased, and the one who was coming had halted, or gone back—perhaps was in hiding, to ascertain the result of the shots, which he must have heard.

Extreme caution, therefore, was necessary, or he might get a shot from out of the darkness, so he quickly sought the timber, and made his way to his horse.

There stood the animal, just where he had left him.

"Whoever was the rider did not get this far, but turned back, or hid at the sound of firing.

"I must go slow," decided the scout.

He began to move around on foot, and made a thorough search of the surroundings, and many minutes were thus occupied; but he found nothing.

Convinced that, whoever the horseman might have been, the firing must have scared him off, he set to work to find the ranchero.

Unmoved by all that had happened about him, as he stood talking to the moon, Manton Marr had been aroused to a sense of his danger by the shots fired so near him, one bullet coming near him.

The scout argued that he had sought cover, instinctively, and might still be in hiding.

Returning to the spot, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Manton Marr, where are you?"

There was no reply.

"I am your friend, pard—the one you wrote to for aid, and have come to help you."

Still no reply answered the call.

"Pard, do not fear me; come out! You will see that I am your friend."

Still no response, no sound.

As others might be near, Buffalo Bill would not call his own name.

There was the open grave, half finished it seemed, but the pick and spade were gone!

Even in his flight and fright, Marr had taken the implements with him.

"I think I shall camp right here for the night, and see what daylight will reveal," Buffalo Bill decided.

His horse was unsaddled, and staked out, his blankets spread, and he lay down to rest.

At first he did not care to sleep, but waited to see what might turn up, for he had taken up his position very near to the trail, yet concealed by the timber.

After awhile his eyes grew heavy; no one came along the trail, as he had hoped would come, if hiding Manton Marr did not reveal himself, and the scout dropped off into a deep sleep.

When he awoke it was with a start.

He had a feeling that some one had been near to him, or was then near.

It was yet dark, but experience told the great pathfinder that dawn was at hand.

The day was breaking, but with the apprehension that some person had been near him, he would not again go to sleep; so he sat, rifle in hand, and waited.

The gray light slowly dispelled the darkness, and at last a ray of the rising sun fell into the canyon.

The scout had not moved from his blankets.

If others were near, he wished them to show themselves first.

Convinced at last that no one was close at hand, he arose, rolled up his blankets, and went to his horse.

The animal was there just as he had left him.

Leading him to where he had left his

saddle and bridle, in the edge of the timber, quite near where he had slept, Buffalo Bill stopped suddenly.

His eyes were not upon his saddle and bridle, but upon an object near them.

"The Brand of the Black Brotherhood again!" he said, as he bent over and pulled from the ground a tiny staff to which fluttered a black flag!

The skull and crossbones were upon it also, and, pinned to it was a slip of paper.

"Be warned a second time!"

"Beware of the third warning!"

"Go back from this trail, for the end will be fatal!"

This Buffalo Bill read, written in red pencil.

"I felt that some one was near me when I awoke.

"Well, bad as they are, it seems I have a friend among the Black Brotherhood.

"But, I never took kindly to warnings, so I will stick to this trail, and see just whom it will prove fatal to.

"Now, to look and see if the Black Brother who so kindly warned me left any trail."

With this he saddled his horse, led him to where his blankets were, strapped them on, put the little flag away with the other one, and mounting, rode back to the open grave, to find it as he had last seen it in the moonlight.

It was dug on the bank of a stream, dry, except in the rainy season, and was but half finished.

For whom had the grave been intended?

Why had the ranchero been digging it by night?

Questions the scout could not answer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RUINED RANCH.

Buffalo Bill looked attentively all about the grave.

Only the tracks of the ranchero were there in the soft dirt, but no trail going from the spot was visible.

The soil of the canyon bed was too hard for a footprint to show, though an iron-shod hoof would leave its mark.

Making no discovery about the grave, Buffalo Bill rode over to where the man had been in ambush when he fired upon the ranchero.

Quickly he dismounted, for, lying upon the ground, was the rifle, and its barrel was stained with blood.

The scout's bullet had evidently struck true, and the hand that supported the rifle had been badly wounded.

But, that was not all, for, at the base of the tree, not far from the rifle, was a mask and cloak, both jet black!

In his haste the assassin had not had time to pick up the disguise which stamped him as one of the Black Brotherhood.

The scout swung the rifle, which was a fine one, and of recent manufacture, to his saddle horn, and, rolling the mask in the cloak and folding them in his blankets, he strapped them again to the cante.

That done, he followed the track the man had taken in his flight, and saw that it was marked by red drops from the wounded hand.

Reaching the spot where the man had mounted his horse, Buffalo Bill, to his surprise, found no trail leading away from there; the horse of the outlaw had left no tracks.

"They work it well; but I'll solve the secret yet," muttered the pathfinder.

"Now, to get out of the quandary I am in. I don't just like the situation," he continued.

"I know that the man who attempted to kill Mr. Marr was one of the Black Brotherhood, for his cloak and mask prove that; I know, too, that one of the same gang warned me to give up this trail, and he it was whom I doubtless heard coming when that fellow fired on Manton Marr.

"He supposed it was some one else

than a brother outlaw. I only wish he had waited and I could have seen the meeting, and then chipped in.

"But, who is it that warns instead of kills me, when he certainly had the chance?"

"And why does he spare me, I wonder?"

"And where did Manton Marr go?"

"If I stand here asking myself questions which I cannot answer I'll never reach the end of this trail; so come, old horse! We'll go on and see what there is at Overlook Ranch."

With this the scout rode on his way down the canyon.

All his skill as a trailer was at fault now, for he could neither track the rancher or the outlaw, nor find any trace of the one who had placed the second warning by his saddle.

The trail through the canyon was well defined, and he knew that he must be drawing near to the sought-for ranch.

Soon the end of the canyon was reached, and he saw smoke rising over a distant hill, as from a large fire.

"The home of Manton Marr must be in that timber on the hill, but that smoke looks ominous," he said, as he turned in the direction of the hill.

In half an hour he had ridden up the hill, and, seated upon his horse, was gazing with sad face upon the smouldering ruins of what had once been a comfortable frontier home.

The cabin of the rancher, the out-buildings, all had been burned, and all was now a scene of desolation and ruin.

Two large dogs lay dead near by, and from the ashes at one end of the living cabin appeared the charred remains of a human hand and arm.

The hand grasped a revolver, and the fate of a human being was known.

What others had also died in that burned cabin?

Who knew?

Who would tell?

Was not this the work of the Black Brotherhood?

About the valley, far away, and seemingly still affrighted, were herds of cattle, and this was all the scene of life about the ruined ranch.

Buffalo Bill's face was set and stern.

He had reached his destination, to find the home of his friend in smoking embers and ashes.

That friend had he seen the night before, maddened by his sorrows, talking to the moon, at the side of a grave which he had been digging.

Who had been the ones he had had to mourn of his family?

Was the wounded girl he had met with one of his household?

Was the loving wife dead, in the ashes before him?

The scene aroused sympathy, sorrow, and a feeling of intense desire for revenge in the breast of the scout, against the perpetrators of such a terrible deed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE YOUNG RANCHER'S VOW.

For a long while Buffalo Bill walked about the destroyed home, while his horse fed near, and pondered over the sad scene before him.

If he had only arrived sooner, he thought, might he not have averted the tragedy?

What was to be done?

Whom could he call upon for help, or for information, or for advice?

For answer, suddenly his horse raised his head and gave a low whinny.

Buffalo Bill was on the alert at once.

It might be one of the cowboys from the ranch, who had escaped the destroyers.

It might, also, be a foe.

A horse was certainly coming, and at a gallop, but was concealed by a clump of small timber.

Soon he came into view, and not a hundred yards from where the scout stood.

Buffalo Bill's attitude was not hostile, but he was ready to meet friend or foe.

The stranger's eyes were upon the smoking ruins, and he had advanced some distance toward the scene before he discovered the scout.

When he did so he drew rein, while his hand dropped upon a revolver in his belt; but Buffalo Bill called out:

"Hold, pard, and take it easy, for there may be no need of revolver practice between us."

The horseman still held his hand upon his revolver, but asked:

"Who are you?"

Buffalo Bill saw a handsome young fellow, clad in a garb half Mexican, half American, with slouch hat, embroidered in silver, and a striking general appearance.

He was mounted on a splendid horse, and the saddle and bridle were Mexican and heavily adorned with silver.

He wore a red sash about his waist. In it were thrust two revolvers, and with his negligé silk shirt, top boots, and make-up he was a very attractive-looking individual, indeed.

His face, too, was one to admire, for it was fearless, and a winning smile hovered about the corners of his mouth, which was hidden by a dark moustache.

In answer to the stranger's query as to who he was, Buffalo Bill replied:

"I am an army scout from the northwest, bearing dispatches, and knowing Manton Marr, came to visit him, but this is all I find."

"Can you explain, sir?"

"Alas, but too well, for it is the work of those accursed demons, the Black Brotherhood, the terror of this part of the country."

"I was away after stray cattle, for my ranch is a score of miles from here, and the Marrs were my friends, and I only learned of this terrible affair from one of the Overlook cowboys, last night, who came wounded to my home."

"Ah, sir, you do not know how fearfully this blow fell upon me, for the one I loved above all others on earth lies buried in those ashes," and the strong man's voice quivered with emotion.

"You refer to the daughter of Mr. Marr, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, to the beautiful Helen."

"Of how many persons did the family consist?"

Mr. Marr, his wife, and daughter, and two negro servants, while half a dozen cowboys lived in their cabin in the foothills; but it is also burned, and only one of the men escaped the deadly hatred of the Brotherhood. The poor fellow lies at my cabin now, wounded quite seriously."

"I knew Mr. Marr, when he was a miner in the northwest, and I have had reason to regard him as my friend. I will make it my duty to investigate this frightful affair, so I will be obliged to you for any information you can give me," said Buffalo Bill.

"I fear it will be put little, sir, more than to say that the Black Brotherhood hated Rancher Marr particularly, as he has been very persistent in hunting them down, and, though all of us in this country have been sufferers at their hands, none of us have felt the weight of a cruel blow like this, and I shall avenge the deed to the bitter end—yes, I shall devote my life to it!" and the young man spoke with a determination of look and manner that showed he was desperately in earnest, while he added, as he raised his hands toward Heaven, and looked upward:

"Yes, here by this ruin, by the ashes of the dead girl I so loved, I vow to track the Black Brotherhood to the gallows!"

"Amen!" answered Buffalo Bill, fervently, and then he asked:

"May I enquire your name, sir?"

"Rupert Redwood, sir, and I live with my sister, Rena, on a ranch a score of miles from here, as I said."

"And my name is William F. Cody, an army scout, as I told you, and I shall

make known this red deed to the commandant of the nearest fort."

"And little good will it do!—Oh, no, I will take it upon myself to avenge my friends—you have heard my vow."

CHAPTER XVII.

A FAIR HORSEWOMAN.

In his conversation with the young rancher Buffalo Bill had uttered no word of his having, as he believed, seen Helen Marr the night before, wounded and in great distress, nor of his discovering the father digging a grave and behaving as though his mind had been crazed by his sorrows.

The scout, still cautious, wished to know just who the stranger was before he made any further advances or admissions; he would not betray his own knowledge of what he had discovered until he knew for a certainty that the man was just what he represented himself to be.

So he told him that he must push on to the fort, a day's ride from there, and attend to the business which had brought him to Arizona.

It was true that Buffalo Bill did have dispatches for the commanding officer at Fort Verde, and a letter to him asking that the scout should receive any aid requested by him in the special duty he went to Arizona to perform.

"You must visit me, Mr. Cody, if you remain in our country for any time," said Rupert Redwood, as the scout said that he must go on his way.

"I shall take pleasure in giving you a call, sir; but I suppose you will see to getting the bodies from this ruin and burying them?"

"Oh, yes, I will attend to the sad duty. I shall return to my ranch for my men, and my sister will accompany me."

"It will be a terrible blow to her, when she hears the appalling story I have to tell, for she was devoted to Helen and her parents."

The scout and the young rancher parted, Buffalo Bill asking him to tell him the most direct trail to Fort Verde.

This Rupert Redwood did, and the scout started on his way, but halted on a distant range, and went into camp near a spring in the foothills.

He found good grazing for his horse, gathered some wood, and soon had a fire by which he cooked breakfast, and then going to a high hill, glass in hand, he began to sweep the valley far and wide.

He particularly kept his glass upon the smoke that still rose from the ruins, and, after a long view, returned to his horse, saddled him, and started back toward the place where he had met the young rancher, and not upon the trail to Fort Verde.

He rode at a canter, and approached the smouldering ruins by the timber in the rear, making a flank movement to do so.

As he reached the edge of the timber, where he could see all about him, he drew rein suddenly, for there, seated upon a horse, gazing at the charred remains of the cabin, was a woman!

"It is the wounded girl I saw last night!"

"Thank Heaven, she was not so seriously hurt as she feared, and escaped the Black Brotherhood, after all," and Buffalo Bill rode out of the timber to meet her.

His approach was quickly discovered, and she turned as though to fly, but changed her mind and faced the scout, though her hand fell upon a revolver butt in a holster in her saddle.

Drawing near the scout realized his mistake, for it was not the same horse, nor was it the wounded girl whom he had befriended.

She was not unlike her, however, and her habit, or dress, was much the same.

Raising his sombrero, he said, as he approached:

"A sad sight, lady, especially as I believe this was your home."

She turned upon him a pair of dark,

glorious eyes, and a face that was beautiful, yet strangely sad looking, and replied in a low, sweet voice:

"It is a sad sight, indeed, sir, especially as I fear those who dwell here lie in the ruins there."

"Some, at least, do. They were friends of yours, I suppose."

She hesitated before she replied, in a strange way:

"Yes, friends; but you are a stranger here, for surely you cannot be one of those who did or who permitted this cruel deed."

"No, no, indeed, I am no human monster, such as the perpetrators of this act were. I am an army scout, miss, on my way to Fort Verde, and, knowing Mr. Manton Marr, I stopped to see him, but only to find, alas! ruin and death to greet me."

"I beg pardon for my words, sir, a moment since. If you are going to Fort Verde, tell the commandant there that it would be well for him to quit the hunt for poor redskins and send his soldiers upon the track of the band known as the Fatal Thirteen, fatal to all whom they select as their prey."

"When he does this faithfully, and cannot find any clue to the lawless band, tell him there will be one to tell him a secret, but not until his every effort fails. Good morning, sir!"

"Stay, one moment, miss."

"Well, sir?"

"Suppose I take the trail of this ruthless band, may I depend upon you to aid me if my own efforts fail?"

She gazed fixedly into his face a moment, and said in a decided tone:

"Yes, when you have done your duty fully, and I will know, for I am aware that you are Buffalo Bill."

She was off like a flash, as she uttered the name, and, though Buffalo Bill called to her several times, she did not halt, merely waving her hand as she rode on her way in a rapid run.

"Who and what is she?" muttered the scout, as he watched her until she disappeared. Then he added:

"Now to take the trail of that young ranchero."

He had passed through the timber, and was following the rancher's trail into a narrow pass, when, suddenly, several lariat coils came swirling through the air, and he and his horse were both ensnared, while a voice called out:

"Surrender, or die! Take your choice!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LIFE IN DEADLY DANGER.

Buffalo Bill's severe training had schooled him for every emergency.

He had not expected an ambush, so was caught wholly off his guard.

Before he could draw a revolver, grasp the rifle swinging at his saddle horn, he was encircled by a lasso, which pinioned his arms to his side, while a second noose was drawn tightly about his neck.

With the same deadly coils about him, a third had been cast over the head of his horse.

The animal would have bounded away in fright, but a word from his master checked him, for the latter knew but too well that his faithful horse would be dragged to the ground.

To the words of the man, Buffalo Bill coolly responded:

"In a choice between life and death I prefer to live."

"Who and what are you?" was asked.

"I am an army scout, bearing dispatches to Fort Verde."

"A likely story, but one that does not go down with us," and a man stepped into view, his revolver cocked and covering the scout.

He was a tall, good-looking fellow, a fine type of a frontiersman of the better class, and as he stepped into the canyon from a break in the rocks, he was followed by four others, all apparently of his kind.

Three of them held the ends of the

lariats, and the fourth had his rifle ready for quick use if needed.

A good reader of human nature, Buffalo Bill decided at a glance that the men before him were not of the lawless element, and felt that he had little to fear from them.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your will, for I do not care to be detained, as time with me is precious," he said.

"Very precious, now that your neck is in the noose, and you know that you have about come to the end of your rope," replied the leader.

The scout smiled and said:

"Who do you take me for?"

"The leader of the Black Brotherhood, the Fatal Thirteen, or whatever else you may call your lawless band."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"And who are you?"

"The Regulators, on the hunt for all lawless men."

"I am glad to find there are some honorable men in this country, after the scenes of lawlessness I have lately seen here. But, come! I am Buffalo Bill, Chief of Army Scouts in the Northwest, and you must look further if you wish to catch those who burned the Marr Ranch and slaughtered its people."

"Ah! then you know that Overlook and its inmates were burned last night?"

"Yes; I just left the place. All is in ashes there, and a human arm is visible to prove that some of the people perished in the flames."

"How did you know of this?"

"I knew Mr. Marr when he was a miner, and on my trail to Verde came to see him, but only to find his home in ashes."

"Can you prove this?"

"By my word only."

"That is enough. We have reason to believe that you are one of the Black Brotherhood, without your disguise, returned for some reason to the scene of your devilish act, though I must confess you do not look like a man to do such a deed."

"Thanks."

"We just learned at dawn that Marr's Ranch had been burned, and he and his family with it, so you must give proof that you are what you say, for we are out on the trail to avenge this foul crime against the noblest of men and his loved ones."

"If you cannot prove what you assume to be, your neck is in danger, I frankly tell you."

Buffalo Bill was silent for a moment, and then said:

"I think Rupert Redwood would be willing to vouch for me."

"Do you know him?"

"I never met him but once, sir."

"We will take you to his ranch, then, as soon as we have seen the ruined home."

They rode back to the scene of the midnight tragedy, held a few minutes' conversation together, apart, and then set off at a canter, the scout in their company, for the Redwood Ranch.

As they went along Buffalo Bill's keen glance took notice that the tracks of the horse ridden by the young ranchero led that way, so he hoped to find him at home.

It was late in the afternoon when the ranch came in sight—an adobe dwelling situated at the base of the mountains.

It had once been an old Mexican mission, and was, therefore, as strong as a fort, but made a very comfortable dwelling place.

Cattle and horses were feeding upon the plains about the place, but not a soul was visible until the party of Regulators dashed up, with Buffalo Bill their prisoner.

A loud halloo! caused the door to open, and out stepped the young ranchero.

He seemed surprised at the visitation, and demanded:

"Well, what is your wish, men? You come, I suppose, to tell me, as usual, that you can't catch the Black Brother-

hood and ask the aid of myself and cowboys?"

"No, Redwood, we seek no aid of you or your men; but we have a prisoner here whom we intend to hang as one of the Fatal Thirteen, unless you can prove that he is what he says he is, for, after last night's work it is time for deeds, not talk," responded the leader.

"Ho, men up there! Cover these men with your rifles and obey my orders!" cried the young ranchero; and to the surprise of Buffalo Bill and his captors, there suddenly arose above the battlement surrounding the flat roof of the hacienda, half a dozen men, armed with rifles.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

What the young ranchero could mean in suddenly calling upon his men to cover the regulators with their rifles and obey his orders the others could not understand, nor did Buffalo Bill comprehend his hostile act toward his captors, whom he certainly regarded as honest men and law-abiding citizens, anxious to do their duty.

The leader of the regulators saw that he was fairly entrapped, and wholly at the mercy of the men upon the roof of the hacienda, but so great was his amazement, he did not know how to act.

Redwood did not keep them long in suspense, for he called out:

"You see my men, Van Soulsby, and unless you set that man free this instant, I will order them to fire upon you, for in making him a prisoner you commit an act of lawlessness."

The regulators were more than surprised at this, while Buffalo Bill was astounded, for he had found a friend in need with a vengeance, and one who, to serve him, was daring the very regulators themselves.

But he remained perfectly calm, to watch the outcome, and turned his eyes upon the young leader of the regulators, Van Soulsby.

The latter at once replied, and in a somewhat reproachful tone:

"If you vouch for the man, Redwood, that is sufficient, and there is no need of your show of hostility toward us, who you well know are anxious to do no more than our duty, though I am aware that you do not like the men, since they chose me, instead of yourself, for their captain."

"That is not it, for they had a perfect right to select whomsoever they pleased to lead them; but I am tired of this pretended claim that you are the protectors of the people of this country against all lawless bands, and yet do nothing, and now arrest an innocent man, an army scout."

"The only protection this country has had from the Black Brotherhood I have given with my men, as you know, while you have done nothing but hang about Overlook Ranch, trying to win the love of a girl whom you could not protect from the fearful fate she met with last night—she and her family."

"It is false, for I have done my best, with the few men at my command, and asked you and your cowboys to unite with me and form a company strong enough to be of some avail, but you refused, and upon your hands rests the life of that lovely girl and the others who met the awful fate those wretches brought upon her," said Van Soulsby, hotly.

"I will be no man's follower, Van Soulsby. I am my own master, and I shall avenge the girl whom I do not deny I loved," replied the young ranchero.

"God help her! I, too, will avenge her and hers!"

"Yes, as you have protected her and hers from the Black Brotherhood," sneered Redwood, and then he added, quickly:

"But, I make no idle pledges; I will act. But come; there is no need now for

you and I to quarrel, rivals though we were. This is my home and you are welcome, all of you. I request you all to pass the night; only first set my friend there free."

"I will do the latter at once; but, thank you, we cannot accept your invitation, Redwood, though I care for no quarrel with you, and to prove it, again ask you to unite your force with mine. I will yield the leadership to you, though the men dread you from your hot-headedness alone, and not that they have anything else against you."

"Thank you; I must refuse, for I shall take my own men and proceed on my own way to avenge Helen Marr and her people."

"Will you accept my invitation, for it is well meant?"

"Thank you, no."

"Are you supplied with provisions, and all you need for a trail?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"Then release my friend, for he will be my guest."

"Certainly, for it is not our desire to harm an innocent man; but we were told by a cowboy that Overlook Ranch had been burned, with all its people in it, and he thought one of the Black Brotherhood had removed his disguise and remained behind for some special reason, so we very naturally supposed this stranger to be the man."

"I beg your pardon, sir," and Van Soulsby turned to Buffalo Bill, who answered, pleasantly:

"Granted with pleasure, and I hope we may meet again."

With a bow, Van Soulsby wheeled his horse, hesitated a moment, and called back:

"Remember, Redwood, if I can help you at any time against these outlaws you have but to call upon me."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECOND MEETING.

Rupert Redwood bowed in silence at the generous offer of Van Soulsby, and saw the regulators ride away without comment.

Buffalo Bill had dismounted, and was standing by his side, and turning to him, extended his hand and said in his frank way:

"I am much obliged to you, sir, for getting me out of a very serious fix, and I appreciate your act, especially as you really have no proof of who I am other than my word."

"Oh, yes; I have seen you before, and know that you are Buffalo Bill."

"Then there is no need to show you the dispatches I bear, as proof?"

"None whatever, and I am glad to have you as my guest as long as it is your pleasure to remain, but I did suppose you were well on your way to Fort Verde."

"I returned, after going a short distance, to try and get more information about the burning of Overlook Ranch than I really had, feeling assured that Colonel Garrett would ask me much more regarding the terrible affair than I was able to tell him with what I then knew."

"I only wish I could give you some particulars, sir, but the truth is, I know only that the cabin and all else about it is in ashes, and poor Marr and his family are dead amid the ruins. I shall go, to-morrow, to bury what remains we can find in the ruins."

"The fact is, Manton Marr was supposed to be a very rich man, and it was generally known that he had buried somewhere in or about his ranch the gold he got in the mines."

"Of this the Black Brotherhood had heard, and you can, therefore, see their motive in attacking his home, though I do have the hope that his daughter was not slain with the others, but held as a hostage, or for ransom, though this is only surmise."

"But with her father dead, and his gold taken, who would save her?"

"They know that I am well off and was much attached to her, so would pay any ransom within my power for her release."

"Ah, yes; that might be."

"Then, too, Helen Marr was loved by all in this country, for her beauty of face and form, her winning manners, lovely character, and strangely sweet voice; so all who knew her, and every cowboy, even, would chip in his money to save her from harm."

"It is just what might be expected of brave fellows such as most of these men of the border are."

"Now, let me admit that I like that young Van Soulsby, who wanted to hang me."

"He is a fine fellow, brave, dashing, daring, and pretty well off in cattle and horses."

"He was my rival, and a dangerous one, too, and would give all he possesses to save Helen Marr from danger; but I did not think I was treated just right in not being made captain of the regulators, and so neither I nor my men belong to the band."

"And just who are these regulators?"

"Well, Soulsby is their captain, and they number twenty-five, with him. Several are cattle owners and ranchers, the others are cowboys from the ranches, three or four being from Marr's home, but the latter I fear met the fate of the family."

"They are a band of gallant fellows, too, and are supposed to be the protectors of this country, only the Black Brotherhood are too clever for them."

"I have seen service, and also am the more fitted for leader, while I would have carried with me ten good men and true, my cowboys; but, it was a case of personal popularity, and Van Soulsby won, so I drew out with my men, yet have no ill will against the band—none whatever, and I really would do all I could to help the regulators run down the outlaws, though I do not expect they will, and so I shall take the trail with my own men."

"But come! I am forgetting all hospitality, yet I feel that you will pardon me, as I am completely undone by this terrible affair."

With this, the young rancher called one of his men to take Buffalo Bill's horse, and then led the scout into his large, rambling, fort-like old home, which had once been an old mission, as Rupert explained.

"The chapel is now in ruins," he said, "yet we make ourselves comfortable and have ample room for our guests. The Mexicans and Indians say the place is haunted by evil spirits, but, as it was the home of good people, I do not see why bad ones should be here in spectre form."

"They do not trouble me, however, and we are not disturbed, though I believe that many tragic scenes are said to have been enacted here."

Buffalo Bill was gazing at the interior of the old mission with interest, but was surprised at the comfortable room he was led into, and just then saw a lady rise to greet him.

The rancher introduced him:

"Sister, this gentleman is an army officer, of whom you have heard—Buffalo Bill."

To the surprise, of the scout he saw before him the horsewoman he had seen at the burned ranch!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FAIR MAID OF THE MISSION.

When introduced by the young rancher to his sister, Buffalo Bill's face lighted up with instant recognition and pleasure, for he had thought much of the strange horsewoman he had seen at the ruined cabin, and wondered when and where he would find her, if he needed the aid she had voluntarily promised, if he failed to find the outlaws.

He had been half tempted to ask Van

Soulsby who she was, but had not done so, after second thought. He preferred to let his strange meeting with the unknown girl remain a secret, at least for the present.

But now, meeting her in her own home, he supposed he had the right of recognition, and stepped toward her with courteous bow.

She was not dressed in her riding habit then, but looked equally as beautiful, yet just as sad-faced, as when he had met her at the ruined cabin that morning.

To his surprise, she showed no sign of recognition, whatever, but extended her hand and said:

"I am pleased to welcome my brother's guest—especially one who has won such fame as a borderman."

Buffalo Bill's smile of recognition changed. He checked the words he was about to utter about their previous meeting, and it crossed his mind very quickly that she did not wish to be recognized, nor wish that meeting known to her brother.

So he merely replied in thanks for her complimentary greeting, and, a moment after, followed the rancher to the pleasant room he was to occupy.

"Well, she does not wish her brother to know of our former meeting, that is certain, from her manner."

"So be it, I can keep the secret if she wishes it, and I will be mighty careful of what I say and do here, but keep my eyes open, all the same."

"These are pleasant quarters, surely, especially for one who sleeps out of doors three hundred nights in the year."

"It shows the care of a woman's hands, and a beautiful and refined woman, too, yet how inexpressibly sad she looks," and Buffalo Bill glanced about the pretty room with considerable interest and admiration.

He soon made his toilet, such as was possible for one who lived in the saddle, and went out into the large living room where he had met his fair hostess.

He hoped to find her alone, and have her give him some reason for her refusal to recognize him.

In this he was successful, for she was alone in the large room, and laid down a book as he entered, at the same time rising and saying, pleasantly:

"Sit down, Mr. Cody. My brother will soon return, and then we will have supper."

Buffalo Bill took a seat and replied:

"It is not often that I get an opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of so pleasant a home, Miss Redwood."

"May I ask if you are not often very lonely here, for you surely have been reared in very different surroundings?"

"True, yet I do not complain, and were some things different from what they are I would be content."

"It will be a great loss to you, Miss Mar's unfortunate fate," and not a hint did Buffalo Bill give of his belief in her being alive.

He had made up his mind that he would tell nothing, only listen and watch all developments.

"I can hardly believe that she is dead, sir, it is so terrible, for, bad as we know the outlaw band to be, I can hardly think they would have burned down the cabin of Mr. Marr, knowing that his wife and daughter were in it, or with even men under its roof."

"It was an appalling crime, and they deserve the worst punishment that can be meted out to them."

"They do, indeed; but I see no way of punishing them—in fact, feel very sure they will escape, as they always have, for no one knows who they are, where they dwell, or anything about them."

This was certainly different from her words at the destroyed ranch, when she had said that if all other attempts to capture the Black Brotherhood failed to call upon her.

Of this Buffalo Bill took due notice, and replied:

"Have you no clue as to their identity?"

"No, I only wish that I had, or could be instrumental in bringing them to the gallows, for it would be a great boon for this country."

"Captain Van Soulsby of the regulators, I am sure, will be desperately in earnest, now that they have carried off or killed Helen Marr, and he is a brave and clever man, while my brother will leave no stone unturned in the same good cause."

"Still, I fear all will be to no purpose, no purpose, unless—"

She paused and the scout asked:

"Unless what, Miss Redwood?"

"Unless you take the trail, Mr. Cody; but, then our people are very jealous of having strangers come in and do the work they should accomplish."

"But here comes my brother," and Rupert Redwood just then entered the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSIN.

It was a very tempting meal that Buffalo Bill sat down to in the Redwood Ranch, and he enjoyed the good edibles greatly.

Over both the sister and brother a gloom seemed to rest, which the scout naturally set down to their having lost dear friends in the Marr family.

But, he was somewhat surprised, for this same reason, when the rancher asked his sister to sing.

She obeyed, asking the scout what his favorite songs were, and promptly singing several ballads he named, as well as some of her own selection.

The rancher left the two alone, and seemed much worried with his preparations to go with his men upon the trail of the Black Brotherhood at dawn, intending first to go by the Marr ranch and bury the dead.

Several times Buffalo Bill tried to lead the maiden to admit her meeting with him that morning, but she eluded all efforts to draw from her the admission, and at last, when he bade her good-by, for he, too, intended to leave for Fort Verde at dawn, he was in a quandary as to what to believe regarding her.

"Upon your return, Mr. Cody, stop with us, and if you find, as I feel sure will be the case, that nothing has been done to capture the outlaws, try and make up your mind to take the trail, for that will mean their capture and punishment, I am certain," she said.

"Perhaps I may, Miss Redwood; but I have every faith in your brother, and also think that handsome young Soulsby will give a good account of himself and his regulators," was the answer.

Retiring to his room, Buffalo Bill sat down to think, for he certainly was in a quandary.

"Is that the woman I met at Marr's burned cabin or not?"

"Why, of course, it is, for two persons could not be so alike; and then, too, if it was not Miss Redwood, who could it be?"

"She did not give herself away by look or word, and I am glad that I did not, either, for these old missions have ears in the walls, they say."

"Yes, it was Miss Redwood, and for some reason she wished not to refer to it, yet certainly she did say she believed that the outlaws would never be taken unless I took the trail!"

"Well, in good time she will speak, no doubt, so I will wait patiently and watch events as they pass, only I am determined to find poor Marr and his daughter, if the wound those devils gave her did not kill her."

"How strange that each time I was about to tell of seeing her and him something checked the words upon my tongue!"

"I heeded, too, and I will keep the secret, at least until I deem it necessary to divulge it."

So mused the scout as he sat in his room before retiring.

At last he threw off his clothes and went to bed.

The windows were open, and a cool breeze lulled him to sleep, for it came through the flower garden and was laden with fragrance.

How long he had been asleep Buffalo Bill did not know, but he awakened suddenly, yet did not move.

His long experience on the plains told him that he had awakened from a sense of impending danger!

But what danger could come to him in that secure house?

He did not move; he simply lay with eyes wide open, looking toward the windows.

He had taken his belt of arms to bed with him; that was his unfailing custom; and one hand was resting upon the butt of one of his revolvers.

As he continued to gaze toward the window he suddenly saw a form arise from the floor—the form of a man!

Buffalo Bill saw the intruder by the dim light, for it was moonlight without, and the man's entrance through the window it was which had awakened him.

The man was crouching, and one arm was outstretched, and in the hand was something very like a long knife.

Noiseless as a cat, nearer and nearer crept the person toward the bed, and, in a moment, bent over the scout. The hand was raised and there was no doubt now but that it held a knife.

Another moment and a death-blow would come.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TO WIPE OUT A STAIN.

When the knife was poised above him, and the assassin had discerned the spot where to strike, it seemed as though nothing could prevent the deadly act.

Still Buffalo Bill did not move! He even breathed naturally, as one in a deep sleep, yet it was too dark to see that his eyes were watching every movement of the assassin.

Then there was a startle!

As the knife stroke was made, up shot the seeming sleeper's hand; a clash of steel; the descending blade was caught in the guard of the revolver; a wrench of an iron wrist snapped the blade in twain; the scout's left hand closed upon the throat of the midnight assailant, and dragged him down upon the bed, where he was held in a grasp he could not shake off.

It took the scout just two minutes to bind his prisoner, who, wiry and strong as he was, could do nothing against such giant strength.

The sash of the prisoner served to bind him, and striking a light, Buffalo Bill turned it upon the man.

The latter turned his face away and did all he could, bound as he was, to conceal himself, but in vain.

The scout recognized the wretch, for he said:

"Ah! it is you, Pedro Garcia, my old-time enemy when you were scouting in the northwest!"

"I thought you were dead, but I find you very much alive. I recall that you left the fort with the murder of a soldier against you, and I shall deliver you over to Colonel Garrett at Fort Verde, with a list of your crimes that will hang you."

"As our little fracas does not seem to have disturbed the house, I shall not do so now, but let you rest until dawn, for we have some hours to sleep yet."

With this the scout more securely bound his prisoner, after which he again lay down to sleep, leaving the man upon the floor, groaning in agony of spirit.

Just at dawn he was awakened for an early start, and when he entered the breakfast room, to his surprise he found Rena Redwood up and with her brother.

As he entered he had his hand upon the shoulder of his prisoner, and in the

other grasped the broken hilt and blade of the knife.

At sight of the two, both Rupert Redwood and his sister started with amazement, the former crying out:

"My God, Mr. Cody, what does this mean?"

"Simply, Mr. Redwood, that this man crept into my room at midnight through the open windows that look upon the garden, and, believing I was asleep sought to knife me."

"I have the happy faculty of waking up when danger threatens, so I watched him until he sought to strike the blow, and then shattered his knife with my revolver, as you see."

"Impossible! That is one of my best men, Mr. Cody."

"That may be, sir, but he serves another master as well, the Devil, as I happen to know."

"No, no!"

"Yes, I recognize him as a scout in the northwest, and I know of half a dozen crimes he can be hanged for."

"This is not his first attempt upon my life, for he is an old enemy of mine."

"I am sorry you have been so imposed upon as to harbor such a wretch in your home."

"But, why did you not give an alarm, sir?" Rena asked.

"There was no need to disturb the household, Miss Redwood, when I could manage him very comfortably, so I bound him and went to sleep again."

"You are a strange man, Mr. Cody," and turning to her brother, who was pacing the floor with angry face and flashing eyes, she continued:

"Brother, what are we to do about this act toward our guest?"

Before he could reply Buffalo Bill said:

"Don't worry about it, Miss Redwood, for I shall take him to Fort Verde with me, and my testimony will hang him."

Instantly Rupert Redwood wheeled upon the man, and, whipping out a revolver, leveled it at him, as he cried:

"No, I will wipe out this stain upon our hospitality, Rena."

"Pedro Garcia, you shall die by my hand!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

SAVED BY HIS FOE.

The white, angry face of Rupert Redwood, as he paced the floor while Buffalo Bill told his sister and himself the story of Pedro Garcia's midnight attempt to assassinate him, revealed how deeply he was moved by the act of one of his own people.

Pedro Garcia was his Chief of Cowboys, his right-hand man, and had ever borne a most excellent reputation with all who knew him in that part of the country.

Elsewhere it had been different, as the scout could prove.

Ever hot-headed and impulsive, reckless in his actions, guided by impulse, Rupert Redwood did not think or take cognizance of the result of his act toward the Cowboy Chief.

He simply intended to shoot him dead before Buffalo Bill, and thus wipe out the stain put upon his hospitable home by so murderous an act as Pedro Garcia had attempted.

He would take all the consequences of his summary punishment of the man.

Another second and a bullet would have torn through the brain of the intended murderer of the scout.

The Mexican cowboy shrank back with a yell, anticipating the act, and tried to shield himself with his bound hands, at the same time shouting out some Spanish words and prayers commingled.

But there was no mercy in the face of Rupert Redwood.

"Brother! Rupert!" cried Rena, in accent of terror.

But still, in the few seconds that were passing in this dread ordeal, Rupert Redwood had strode toward the prisoner, his revolver had been drawn from

his belt, was leveled, and the aim was upon the man's head, the finger upon the trigger.

But Buffalo Bill was accustomed to just such scenes.

The terror of the Mexican, mad rage of the rancher, and alarm of Rena did not disturb him in the least.

He knew that a murder must not be committed to avenge an attempt at one.

He realized the young rancher's position, his feelings, and that he was in deadly earnest.

But he must not permit a crime to avenge a crime.

In an instant he sprang forward, and his good right hand struck up the leveled revolver.

Just as he did so Rupert Redwood pulled trigger.

The sharp report followed, a vase of flowers was shattered to atoms by the bullet, and the two servants in the breakfast room dashed out of the door for their lives.

"Mr. Redwood, you are mad!"

"Would you commit a murder, sir?" sternly said the scout.

"Yes, Rupert, would you do an act so heinous, when this man is Mr. Cody's prisoner?" cried Rena.

The words of both recalled the young rancher to himself.

Instantly he calmed down and said:

"Yes, I was mad."

"I am myself now, and the man is your prisoner, Mr. Cody, to carry to Fort Verde for punishment."

"I will see that he is safely guarded while we have breakfast."

With this he led the Cowboy Chief, white and trembling at his narrow escape, out into the plaza of the hacienda and sent one of the terrified servants after several of his men.

Then, in low, earnest words in Spanish, the man addressed the rancher, seemingly pleading for his mercy.

But soon the cowboys came, and with but a word in answer to his pleadings, Rupert Redwood turned the prisoner over to them, with the remark that if he escaped he would be merciless toward the one who allowed it.

Returning to the breakfast room, the young rancher again expressed his deep regret at the occurrence in his home, Buffalo Bill remarking:

"As I told Miss Redwood, sir, I tell you, not to think of it again, for it is what one who leads the life I do must constantly expect."

"I shall take the man to Fort Verde, and a trial there will hang him for his many crimes."

With this the conversation turned upon other subjects, and the breakfast passed without further mention of the subject.

"We go different trails, Mr. Cody, so I have ordered Garcia's horse saddled for him, so you can take him to the fort, and I will put you in the right way."

Again farewells were said, and with his prisoner, bound in his saddle and riding by his side, Buffalo Bill started for Fort Verde, while the rancher and his cowboys went on the trail to the ruined home of Manton Marr.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE TRAIL.

Pedro Garcia, in spite of his faithful services to Rupert Redwood, had a face that was against him.

He was a Mexican, and spoke English fluently, but there was the sinister look about him that so many of the lower class of his race possess.

He was very indifferent in manner, after his first fright was over, and eyed the scout with a scowl of hatred not to be hidden.

Buffalo Bill had secured him to his saddle, had seen that he could not escape, yet was not anxious to cause him suffering on the ride, so had left his hands comparatively free.

He held his bridle rein and had him ride along by his side.

As the scout had nothing to say to his prisoner, he rode along in silence, but Pedro Garcia was anxious to talk, and after several miles had been gone over he said:

"I suppose you intend to hang me, Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, no, I'll leave that for the proper persons to do, when you have been tried."

"Is not a bag of gold better use to you, senior, than the pleasure of seeing me hanged?"

"No, for I do not accept bribes to do a wrong, and if I did I would simply have to hunt you down later."

"You had the chance to choose between right and wrong, so you have to take the consequences."

"I've been a good man since I saw you in the northwest."

"There was no temptation in your way, for just as soon as I came you decided to be avenged on me, caring nothing for the trouble you would have gotten your kind employer."

"No, Pedro, you are bad clean through."

"I feel kindly toward you now, for you did not let Senor Redwood kill me."

"I simply did not wish a tragedy in the presence of a lady, and also have him cheat the gallows."

"He meant to kill me."

"Of that there is no doubt, for he is rash, impetuous, and acted without consideration."

"I am glad, for his sake, that I prevented him from killing you."

"Then we can't trade?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can't come to terms for my life?"

"No, indeed."

"All right, if I don't hang, remember it is war to the knife between us, Buffalo Bill."

"All right, I accept the consequences, for it was that before."

"Then, don't you forget it, when it comes my time to be master."

"You talk big for a man with a rope about his neck."

"Why, Pedro, my testimony of half a dozen crimes you have been guilty of will hang you."

"Perhaps," was the laconic remark.

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but saw ahead a narrow pass through a ridge.

"It will be miles out of my way, Pedro, but I don't like that place a little bit, so shall flank it."

"What for?" almost gasped the man, and Buffalo Bill saw that his face had turned deadly pale, while he had suddenly become very nervous.

"Well, it is too good a place for an ambush, and some of your cowboy pardos may have taken a notion to head us off and rescue you."

"Nothing of the kind."

"It's only because you are scared."

"Why, it will be twenty miles further to flank that pass."

"I do not believe it, from the lay of the land, and think I can do it in two or three miles."

"At any rate, it is better to ride twenty miles further than to be shot."

"Well, I didn't think you was so easily scared, Buffalo Bill."

"I confess that I am, for I don't go through that pass."

The prisoner urged, ridiculed, and tried hard to make his captor go through the pass, but in vain.

Brave as he was, the scout was cautious, and he had a suspicion that some of the Mexican's comrades might attempt to rescue him.

He had seen them talking to him earnestly at the hacienda.

If they did, the scout knew that the pass ahead was the very place for them to attempt it.

It was about a dozen miles from the Redwood Ranch, and with their knowledge of the country, they could easily have gotten ahead of him.

So, to the great disgust and evident distress of his prisoner, Buffalo Bill turned to the right to flank the pass.

Had he wanted proof that he was

right, the words and look of the Mexican were sufficient.

As he turned from the direct trail Pedro Garcia became moody and silent.

He evidently saw a chance of rescue fade from him, and the gallows loom up before his eyes again.

Buffalo Bill did flank the pass in a ride of several miles, and then he regained the trail further on, and descended a cut leading down into the bed of a swiftly flowing stream.

Giving the horses their rein to drink, he was patiently awaiting for them to take their fill, when suddenly above him, before and behind him, peering over the banks were half a score or rifles, and a voice said:

"Don't throw your life away, Buffalo Bill, for we've got you dead certain."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FORCED TO TERMS.

At the words of the one who addressed Buffalo Bill from the bank looking down into the stream where his own and the prisoner's horse were drinking, the scout glanced quickly about him, while Pedro Garcia gave a wild shout of joy.

Buffalo Bill took in at a glance that the spot was an excellent one for an ambush.

The stream just there ran through a very thick growth of small cedars, that would readily conceal a number of men, if not their horses.

The men had doubtless reached the spot ahead of the scout, in time to hide themselves on both sides of the stream.

The banks on each side rose some twenty feet above the water, and were about sixty feet apart.

Buffalo Bill saw that there were rifles covering him before and behind him.

To attempt to make a dash to escape would be certain death.

Who his ambushers were he had no doubt about, as over each rifle were the masked head and shoulders of the Black Brotherhood.

But Buffalo Bill's nerve did not desert him for an instant, and he said, quietly:

"I obey, for I have no desire to throw my life away; but I warn you that you are holding up a Government officer in the discharge of his duty."

"We are well aware of that fact, but we also know that your duty conflicts with ours," said the voice.

"In what respect?"

"We tried to ambush you some miles back at the pass, but you flanked us, and gave us a very hard ride to get ahead of you at this point."

"Well, now you are here, and have me under cover, what is your wish?"

"To secure that man you hold as a prisoner."

"And intend to have hanged as soon as he reaches Fort Verde, for he told me so."

"Don't powwow with him, pardos, but riddle him with bullets, or he'll yet hang some of you," cried Pedro Garcia excitedly.

"Silence, sir."

"Be satisfied with our rescue of you and make no suggestions," sternly said the leader.

"Pardon, senior captain, but you do not know what this man can do as I know it."

"I know all, and will have no interference."

"As I take it, you are the gang of murdering outlaws known as the Black Brotherhood?" said Buffalo Bill.

"We are."

"Then this man Garcia is one of your number, yet has been a trusted cowboy at the Redwood Ranch."

"We do not say that he is."

"Why rescue him, then?"

"We rescue any one in distress."

"You rescue any villain, and murder honest men in doing so."

"Do not be too severe, for my desire is not to harm you."

"I am never choice in my language to cut-throats."

"A silent tongue sometimes may save your life."

"I take all chances."

"But come, what do you wish?"

"Your prisoner."

"Suppose I refuse to give him up?"

"We will riddle you with bullets."

"I do not believe you."

"Why not?"

"You would have fired on me at first, if you had intended to kill me."

"We do not wish to kill you."

"Strange that, when you love to kill women and children."

"I have had enough of that talk, so if you value your life keep a civil tongue in your head."

"I have been threatened before, and though I do not doubt but that you would be glad to kill me as Buffalo Bill, as a Government officer you dare not, for the Black Brotherhood would be very quickly wiped off the face of the earth."

"We will not discuss that, and I don't believe the soldiers would be sent to avenge you."

"I have about a hundred scouts under my command who would go on the trail for scalps, did you kill me; but don't let that deter you, for my life would be cheap, indeed, if it resulted in the hanging of your gang of cut-throats."

"Will you listen to what I have to say?" impatiently asked the leader.

"I am compelled to do so."

"I will spare your life, for, though our bitter foe, and we have comrades to avenge, we admire you for what you are."

"Thanks, awfully; but what is your little game?"

"Don't report having seen us when you reach Verde, and merely say that your prisoner escaped from you, and you can go on your way in safety."

"I refuse."

"What?"

"To lie for you."

"I shall report your rescue of my prisoner, where it was, and that you were ten in number."

"Your refusal will cost you your life."

"I don't believe it—fire away!"

It was a bold bluff for Buffalo Bill to make, but it had its effect, for after a moment the leader said:

"Remain where you are, Buffalo Bill, until I give you further orders; but release the rein of Garcia's horse, and allow him to come to us."

Without a word Buffalo Bill obeyed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO SHOTS.

The bold bluff of Buffalo Bill had won, though he had taken desperate chances. The outlaws did not fire upon him.

He had defied them and they had backed down, as he had expected they would.

Then, too, the stand they had taken had forced the scout to terms.

It went sadly against him to have to give up his prisoner, but he was no fool, and knew that if he resisted, or forced them to do so, he would be killed.

"Hello, there!" he called out, as the prisoner rode out of the stream to go up the narrow cut to the bank ahead.

"Well!" said the leader, peering over the bank.

"I should like to know why you do not kill me?"

"It is my pleasure not to do so."

"Scared, eh?"

"No, but I wished to rescue Pedro Garcia, and am glad to have done so without taking your life."

"I see."

"When I give the word you can go on your way."

"When will that be?"

"After a consultation with my men upon a certain matter."

"All right, give the word soon, for I am getting impatient to go on to the fort."

"You refuse to say that your prisoner escaped without our aid?"

"I do."

"You may regret it."

"I'll take all chances."

"See that you do."

"I say, before you skip off, for that's what you are preparing to do, tell me what you did with that unfortunate girl last night, who fell into your hands after you had wounded her?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"Miss Helen Marr."

"No such thing occurred."

"I know better, for Miss Marr is dead."

"You killed her, then."

"It is not so, for she was burned with each member of her family, and the ranch cowboys, as her father refused to surrender, set some powder afire, and all perished."

"Yes, that was his work, not ours."

"I have my own ideas as to that, and when you are brought to book, those who try you will think as I do."

A savage imprecation was the answer, and when Buffalo Bill called out again he received for answer:

"If you leave that stream before you are given permission, you will get a bullet through your heart!"

"I have warned you, so beware."

Buffalo Bill's reply to this received no answer.

He called out several times, but no reply was returned, and at last he said to himself:

"They have gone."

"I think I'll take chances and go, too."

"They slipped off to where they had left their horses, and are making tracks, anxious to get all the time they can."

"But why they did not kill me is the question, for certainly they know I sent their comrades on their last trail two nights ago."

"And this story about the Marr girl, and her father burning his own cabin, I do not believe a word of."

"Well, I'll take chances and go."

As Buffalo Bill gathered up his reins to leave the stream his eye suddenly fell upon the bank above him.

What he saw caused him to quickly whip out a revolver.

There, close to the bank and peering over he saw the evil face of Pedro Garcia.

The man's malignant look he recognized in a flash.

And more, he saw him leveling a rifle upon him.

It came to Buffalo Bill like an inspiration that the others had come on foot to the stream, from some distance away, where their horses had been left.

That Pedro Garcia having his horse, had been freed from his bonds and left there until his rescuers could get a good start, remaining simply to make Buffalo Bill believe that they were all there, should he attempt to ride on his way.

Left by himself, to follow his comrades on his horse, as soon as the others got a good start, he could not resist the temptation to kill the scout before leaving, rob him, and make what explanation he could to his captain, should his shot have been heard.

Such was Buffalo Bill's quick surmise of the situation, and his revolver was out and leveled just in the nick of time.

The rifle and revolver cracked almost together.

But Pedro Garcia, seeing that his intention was discovered, and knowing the scout's deadly aim, had been hurried and rattled, and did not fire true, for his bullet cut through the brim of Buffalo Bill's sombrero.

On the other hand, Buffalo Bill did fire true, and his bullet entered the brain of his foe.

Instantly the scout spurred out of the stream, up through the cut, and there saw the horse of the Mexican, hitched back from the bank.

And there, upon the very edge of the bank, where he had fallen, was Pedro Garcia, dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TWOFOLD SURPRISE.

Buffalo Bill did not hesitate long as to his course to pursue.

No other of the outlaw band was near, apparently, and his surmise was doubtless right, that Garcia, being mounted, was left to force him to remain in the stream until the Black Brotherhood had gained a long start and covered up their tracks.

He had had his prisoner rescued from him, but now he had gotten him back again, though dead.

He would go on to Fort Verde with all haste, and carry the dead body with him.

"Left alone, he could not resist the temptation to seek revenge by killing me, and a very close call it was that he gave me."

"But my usual luck held true, and though I do not carry him alive to Fort Verde, I take his dead body."

"It is a pity, though, he did not live to be justly punished for his crimes."

"Now to strap the body to the saddle and go on my way."

With this Buffalo Bill led up the horse of the dead outlaw and took the lariat from the saddle.

Before wrapping the form in a blanket, preparatory to strapping it across the saddle, the scout made a hasty search to see if there was anything of importance to be found.

He found a belt with several hundred dollars in gold, some papers which he hastily glanced at, and a crumpled letter.

The latter he read, and it seemed to make a deep impression upon him.

He reread it, and his face was dark and threatening at its contents.

"Well, I was lucky, that is all, and forewarned is being forearmed."

"I shall keep this for my secret."

With this he put the papers in his saddle pocket, along with the belt of gold, strapped the weapons to the horn, and then secured the body firmly across the saddle.

Mounting his own horse then, he led the other animal by the stake rope, and continued on his trail.

He had not gone far before he saw something in the trail that caused him to halt.

"Well, they came and returned this way on foot."

"Ah! they turned off here."

"I shall see to this."

He followed the foot tracks of the outlaws for a mile, and came to a bluff.

He saw that it had been both scaled and descended by the Black Brotherhood, and his experienced eye told him that horses had been staked out upon the plain below.

"I see, this is a plateau they could not reach by riding, without going a long distance around, so they came here and ascending the bluff on foot, cut across to the trail where it crossed the stream."

"They did not wish me to leave the bed of the stream before they got back to their horses."

"But they have mounted and gone, so evidently did not hear Garcia's shot and mine."

"I at least know where to pick up their trail in that valley, without coming here first."

On the scout rode, back to the trail, and after going several miles he came to a canyon through which the trail led down from the plateau to the valley.

Down this he continued, and just as he rode out into the valley he heard a loud shout.

Instantly he looked up the valley, and there beheld the band of the Black Brotherhood.

He realized the situation at a glance.

They had regained their horses, but having much further to ride down the valley than he did across the plateau, they had reached the same spot almost together.

Buffalo Bill felt sure that the outlaws did not intend to turn into the trail leading to Fort Verde, but to cross it and continue on down the valley to some one of their retreats.

Seeing him was as much a surprise to them as to him.

One of their number had just seen him and given the shout of alarm.

At the same time Buffalo Bill had seen them.

They were thirteen in number, his eyes saw at a glance, and that it would be a running fight he quickly realized.

In an instant he had led the outlaw's horse up alongside his own animal and fastened him by short rein.

The outlaws had headed him off at their trail crossing, but they saw that he was not alone.

The horse he led, and that blanket-wrapped form across the saddle, told them that Pedro Garcia had come to a sudden end, and with his boots on.

It was another case for revenge, and now there must be no mercy shown the scout.

Almost as one man they threw their rifles to their shoulders and fired upon him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNERRING AIM.

The situation, for and against him, with the band of the Black Brotherhood, Buffalo Bill took in at a single glance.

In the first place, he saw that they were at long rifle range from him, with their weapons, which did not have the matchless carrying power of his splendid repeater.

They were coming toward him, but he could stick to the trail and escape them, unless some well-aimed shot should strike him or his horse.

Once he got them behind him, in a chase he knew his horse could rapidly distance them, and the dead Mexican's horse was a rapid runner, and looked enduring, too.

The first act of the scout was to bring the outlaw's horse upon his right side, for the Black Brotherhood were in that direction.

This done, Buffalo Bill brought his rifle around for use, bent low upon his horse's neck, and spurred forward along the trail.

This was when the outlaws had fired upon him.

They had seen that their comrade was dead, that the scout was carrying it to the fort.

They hoped to be able to retake it, and to kill or capture the scout.

This was the general wish, and thus it was that involuntarily and without orders, their rifles had risen and a dozen of them had pulled trigger.

Their leader had halted his men and was looking at the scout through his glass.

Hence he did not see what his men were doing until the crash of a dozen rifles came.

Even Buffalo Bill heard his cry:

"My God! what have you done?"

"How dare you fire without my orders?"

One of the men vouchsafed the reply:

"He started to run, sir, and—"

"Is running now."

"Catch him, but the man who fires I will kill!"

"Let your horses do the work!"

The band drove their rowels deep, and the whole band, the Fatal Thirteen, who had so readily recuperated their number, were at once in rapid pursuit.

Buffalo Bill had heard a bullet fly close over his head, another had sunk, with a dull thud, into the body of the dead outlaw; a third had flattened itself against the scout's saddle-horn, and others had knocked up the dust here and there.

But not a bullet had done any harm.

Still, the fire of the outlaws' rifles had shown Buffalo Bill that they were some nearer to him than he had supposed.

He must not remain within that range, that was certain, so he urged his horse on and the animal by his side was put to its full speed.

As the outlaws' horses got stretched out in full chase, Buffalo Bill realized that they were good ones.

All came along like the wind, but several forged ahead.

His own horse could do much better he knew, was at little more than half speed.

But the horse of the dead Mexican was doing his level best.

He did not wish to give up the dead body, and yet he saw that several of the pursuers were gaining upon him.

"I do not wish to kill those fellows, unless driven to it, for they certainly spared me, so I will give them a hint to give up the chase," muttered the scout.

With this he halted suddenly, half wheeled in his saddle, up went his rifle, and with the report the leading outlaw's horse went down, throwing his rider heavily.

On then sped Buffalo Bill, but the shot had not checked the pursuit.

The outlaws believed that the shot had been aimed at a man and hit his horse.

They did not believe the scout could do it again.

There was now one leading horse, and four others bunched together, and all five were gaining upon the scout, retarded as he was by the animal carrying the dead man.

Again Buffalo Bill halted, wheeled in his saddle, and up went his rifle.

At the shot the leading horse went down.

But the scout did not immediately dash on again.

He had halted to give a more decided lesson.

He would show the outlaws that his aim was sure, that his first shot had not been an accident, that he was not aiming at the riders, for some reason, but at their horses to check pursuit.

So once more flashed the rifle at the four horses grouped together, and then again and again.

There was a loud command to halt.

It was obeyed most promptly, for no less than five of the pursuing horses had been picked off by the unerring marksman, and as many of the riders had been dismounted by heavy falls.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SECOND MEETING.

It did not take long for the flying horseman to see that his unerring aim had taught the pursuing Black Brotherhood the lesson he had intended.

They halted, and he drew his horses down to a slow pace.

Turning in his saddle, he saw that they were much excited, and seemingly in a hurry.

He knew that the pursuit had been given up.

The dead horses were stripped of their saddles and bridles, and the five dismounted men mounted up behind comrades.

The saddles were packed upon one horse, his rider riding behind another of the band.

Then the whole party turned back up the valley for some reason, as though to retrace their steps from whence they had come.

Buffalo Bill did not understand this last move, unless as he muttered:

"They wish to throw me off their track, and then, when I am no longer in view, turn and go down the valley, where they must have a retreat."

Continuing on, Buffalo Bill reached the mountain range and halted by a brook for water and rest.

It was noon, and he decided to have his dinner, while giving his horses a rest and allowing them to feed, for grass was plentiful there.

After a frugal dinner he lighted his pipe for a smoke, and was lost in deep reverie when he was startled far more than he cared to admit by the words, close by him:

"We meet again, Senor Scout."

The pipe dropped from between his lips, his hands fell upon his revolvers, and in a second of time Buffalo Bill was facing the speaker and ready for trouble.

But instantly his weapons were replaced and he answered:

"It is a surprise, but a pleasure to meet you again, miss."

"I am glad to see that you are now on your way to Verde."

"Yes, I will arrive at the fort before night; but may I ask why it was that you refused to recognize me when in your brother's house last night, or had you a wish to keep our meeting at the ruined ranch of Manton Marr a secret?"

"I had my reasons—we will not speak of that, sir."

She spoke with evident feeling from some reason, and said before the scout could reply:

"What I do is wholly independent of Rupert Redwood."

"I act for myself alone."

"You know best, Miss Redwood."

"Yes, I do, as some day will prove."

"But you have a dead form wrapped in that blanket, without doubt," and she pointed to the outlaw's body lying near.

"Yes, it is your brother's Chief of Cowboys on his ranch, the man whom you know attempted my life last night."

"Ah! Pedro Garcia."

"Yes."

"You killed him, then?"

"I did, when the Black Brotherhood held me up and left him to guard me, for again he attempted to kill me."

"You have met the Black Brotherhood, then?"

"I have."

"And live to tell the tale?"

"Though strange, it is true."

"Very strange."

"But you will do all in your power to hunt these outlaws down?"

"It is my intention to do so."

"You will find it no easy task; in fact, I believe it is impossible for even Buffalo Bill to accomplish such a hurculean work; but when you are assured that you have done your best and need aid, come to me."

"You can help me?"

"I can."

"Why not do so now?"

"That is impossible, for I must bide my time."

"I will find you at your brother's ranch?"

"No, no, oh, no! don't go there for me."

"Certainly not, if you so wish it."

"I do, I do."

"That you have seen me must remain a secret."

"Did you speak of doing so to any one?"

"Not to a soul."

"I have told nothing, have kept everything I may think or see to myself."

"You are wise."

"It is the best way to conquer success."

"You have headed me off here for some reason, and have ridden hard to do so."

"Can I aid you in any way, or do you wish to tell me anything you dared not at your home?"

"I met you here to tell you not to let the Black Brotherhood escape you, to avenge your friend, Manton Marr, and his family."

"Hunt the Black Brotherhood by day and by night, and show them no mercy, save one."

"That one is the chief, and I wish him taken alive."

"I understand, and there is one other has the same wish regarding him," and Buffalo Bill was thinking of the wounded girl who had made a like request regarding the leader of the Fatal Thirteen.

"Who is that other one?" quickly asked the woman.

"Myself," was the evasive reply of the scout.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A REQUEST GRANTED.

In naming himself as the other one who wished to see the chief of the Black Brotherhood taken alive, Buffalo Bill had not expressed his real thought.

It was the wounded girl who had made the same request of him, that the one

before him now did; but as he had kept secret the fact that he had seen Helen Marr, and knew that she, as well as her father, had escaped alive from their burned home, he had made up his mind to still not speak of this fact, but keep it to himself, for the present at least.

He believed that he could trust the rancher's sister, yet if there were any secrets to tell, and her secret meeting with him implied that there were, he was determined that she should make the first advance toward a confession of what she knew.

That she wished to keep her knowledge of certain things a secret from her brother her actions thus far had shown.

So it was that he implied that he wished to capture this outlaw chief alive.

"Have you any idea of who the man is?" the girl asked him.

"None whatever."

"Have you, Miss Redwood?"

"Frankly, yes."

"May I ask is it a secret?"

"Yes."

"You know him, then?"

"Perfectly well."

"But wish it not known."

"Yes."

"Until a certain time, I judge from your words."

"Yes."

"Until I and others fail to hunt him down?"

"In part, yes."

"There are other reasons?"

"Well, yes."

"You expect others to do what you wish done, yet do not care to have a hand in?"

"You read well."

"But if others fail, then you will act from a sense of duty?"

"That is just it."

"Yet not now?"

"Not until a certain time."

"You wish to gain certain time?"

"I wish to see just what time will reveal."

"Ah!"

"If you, for instance, run down these outlaws, or others even, without aid from me, I am the more satisfied."

"But if not?"

"Then duty demands that when I can bring them to justice I must."

"Yet you desire that the act rest upon other heads than yours?"

"Exactly."

"I believe I can understand your position," said the scout, thoughtfully.

"I am very sure that you do not, for I have proof that you do not."

"But, then, you are a most excellent reader of human nature, I observe, and a good guesser, and you will do much to rid this country of the Black Brotherhood, and I sincerely hope that you will."

"But when all my acts fail, you tell me to come to you?"

"Yes, only then."

"And you will help me?"

"I will."

"You will grant my request that you put me upon the right trail to run down the Black Brotherhood?"

"I will."

"You pledge your word to do this?"

"I do."

"Just when will you do this?"

"When you fail."

"It may be soon."

"It will not be until you have done your whole duty, for I know your character, Buffalo Bill."

"That I promise you."

"Good!"

"But when and where shall I find you?"

She was silent for a moment, and then said:

"I may see you, in fact will do so often perhaps, between now and the time you come to tell me you give up the fight; but let me tell you now whenever or wherever we meet, under no circumstances must you speak to me of our former meetings and conversations, until I first allude to them."

"I understand, Miss Redwood."

"I must be the first to refer to the subject."

"You shall."

"Then you will know that we can talk freely of the secret between us."

"Then your brother even must not know a word of our meeting, save in your home?"

Again she hesitated, and then replied:

"It is better that he should not, at least until I decide to tell him."

"It shall be as you wish, I promise you."

"And Buffalo Bill never breaks his word?"

"Not with intent to do so."

"Very well, but when the time comes for you to say that you give up the fight between you and the Black Brotherhood, come here, alone, and, do you see that large stone?"

"Yes."

"Place under it a note, telling me of the fact, and making an appointment, at least four days after, for fear of accidents, when you will be here, and I will come to meet you."

"Good-by," and with a wave of the hand the girl rode away, leaving Buffalo Bill alone in his little camp.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A COMPACT BETWEEN THEM.

Buffalo Bill silently watched the young girl until she was just disappearing from sight.

His thoughts were busy, and evidently he was evolving something in his mind, for suddenly he said:

"I will tell her, for she must not act in the dark."

With this he gave a loud halloo.

The girl at once turned her horse and rode back toward him, he advancing to meet her.

"I wished to tell you something, Miss Redwood, for I feel that I can place perfect confidence in you."

"I wish you to so feel, Mr. Cody."

"To prove that I do I will tell you a secret."

"I am a woman who can keep a secret, as you will find out when you know me better."

"I do not wish you to act in the dark, nor do I wish to do so."

"It is better not to do so."

"I will tell you, then, frankly, that I was ordered to Arizona to hunt down the Black Brotherhood."

"That is unfortunate for you, as it will be a Herculean task, as I have told you, and you will have a Fatal Thirteen to one."

"True, and the supply of Thirteen appears to be inexhaustible."

"How is that?"

"To my certain knowledge I have killed four of the Thirteen, counting Pedro Garcia as having been one of them, and I know that he was."

"You have killed four?"

"Yes, for I met them the night before I met you at the ruined cabin, and they pursued me, with a result that three were shot."

"But not killed?"

"When I send a bullet on a death mission, Miss Redwood, I know just where it is going, and each man I shot at that night is, or should be, in his grave to-day."

"Then the Fatal Thirteen are but nine now?"

"You are mistaken."

"Even less?"

"No, still thirteen."

"How do you make that out?"

"The supply equals the demand, as I said, for the band that attacked me to-day numbered Thirteen, and that did not count Pedro Garcia."

"Strange."

"I heard, even in the northwest, Miss Redwood, that no matter how many of the band were supposed to be killed, the number was never lessened, but kept up to its limit."

"I, too, have heard this, but then supposed it was a mistake, that those who

claimed to have killed members of the band only thought that they had done so."

"No, they have a reserve always on hand to supply the deficiency."

"It seems so, and after what you tell me I know that it must be so."

"It is so."

"You were saying that you came here to hunt them down?"

"Yes, I am under orders to do so, and I wished to confess as much to you, that you might know I am on this trail to stay to see the end."

"I am glad to know this, for I feared your duties would call you back to the northwest before you could accomplish the purpose I have in view and desire you to do, for no one else should have the praise of this great work, for great work it is."

"Then you may feel that you can trust me, and that I shall play this deadly game without limit."

"To-day I could have emptied half a dozen saddles, but they allowed me to go when I gave up Garcia to them, and I returned the compliment, merely giving them a hint that I spared them by dropping their poor horses, which I disliked to do, though it stopped their pursuit of me."

"You were far more merciful than they were deserving, Mr. Cody."

"It goes against heart and brain to take even the life of an outlawed man simply because he is bad and it is in my power to do so."

"I must have some resistance, for it is cowardly otherwise."

"A noble sentiment and worthy of you."

"But the Fatal Thirteen still have their number complete?"

"Yes, and doubtless their reserve supply is not exhausted."

"I am glad to know this."

"It explains some things to me that were not just clear before," and the girl was very thoughtful, yet did not explain what it was she had not before understood.

Without further comment Buffalo Bill said:

"Now that you know why I am here, Miss Redwood, suppose that we make this a rendezvous, where I can leave a note for you, or you for me, and find occasion to visit it each week."

"I will be glad to do so."

"But if I see you at your home you do not wish me to refer to anything, no matter how important?"

"No, indeed, never!"

"Let this be the rendezvous and post office, and should you meet me anywhere, never under any circumstances must you speak to me of what is between us unless I give you the signal to do so, shaking hands with you with my left hand."

"I shall not forget."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MYSTERIOUS ALLIES.

The girl, as though to enforce her words, held forth her left hand to Buffalo Bill, who grasped it with his left.

She had withdrawn her gauntlet glove to do so, and Buffalo Bill was at once impressed with the knowledge that there was something wrong in the grasp, something unnatural in the hand.

He was quick to perceive, and as she drew her glove on again he observed that the left thumb was missing from the hand.

He was almost startled by the discovery.

Was it a deformity?

Was it an accident?

The scout saw that the thumb of the glove was stuffed, to supply the missing member, as far as the eye went.

He had not noticed it before, when he had met her at the burned cabin, and at her home.

She made no remark about it to explain.

She did not even appear to observe that he had taken notice of it.

But the fact impressed him somewhat painfully, and yet he dared not speak of it to her.

If she wished to do so she would explain, for she it was who had said that the sign between them should be to shake hands with their left hands.

The glove was drawn on again, and the hand looked natural to the scout.

But he knew that the left thumb was missing, and he could not get over the feeling it impressed him with.

With a man it would hardly have caused a second thought.

But with a beautiful girl, to the scout it was terrible, and yet the fact was hardly noticeable unless he shook hands with her.

If not an accident of birth, what did it not tell?

Was there not some story attached to that missing thumb on a young girl's hand?

Was there not some tragedy?

What was the secret of it?

It set Buffalo Bill to thinking.

Without apparently noticing his look and manner, the young girl said:

"You remember our sign now, Mr. Cody, and no other must go."

"I understand."

"No matter where, when, or under whatever circumstances we meet, you must not utter a word to me of the compact, the secret between us, unless I first give you full permission by offering you my left hand."

"So it shall be."

"And you have grasped my left hand, so know what it means."

"Yes."

Buffalo Bill waited for more to be said, a story to be told about the missing thumb.

But none came.

Instead the girl said:

"Now that your mission here is known to me, and I know how well you have begun work already, while you understand that you have a secret friend in me, let me ask you upon whom you intend to call when you need aid?"

"Do you mean men?"

"Yes; do you expect to do your work with soldiers from Fort Verde?"

"No, indeed, for, though I have the highest opinion of what soldiers can do, they are not just suited for this outlaw hunting business."

"You are right."

"But who will you call upon, then?"

"There are a score of scouts at Fort Verde, several of whom I know personally, and they are all brave, clever fellows, whom I can rely upon wholly."

"Yes, all good men, and Buckskin Sam is their chief."

"Yes, I have met him, and know him thoroughly."

"Yes, he is a man to rely upon, and it will be well to have him and his scouts as your allies, when you need them."

"I will."

"But do you object to having allies who will be even more valuable?"

"And who can they be?"

"Those whom I can place under your command."

"In what respect can they be more valuable than Buckskin Sam and his Verde scouts?"

"In that they all ride equally as well, are just as dead shots, can throw the lariat better, are tireless, enduring, and never-failing trailers, while they know every acre of this country even better than do the old owners, the Indians."

"They are men to trust with your life, who will die by your side, die for you if you demand it, and have the best of reasons for serving under you."

"What are these reasons?"

"They all know Buffalo Bill as the King of Bordermen, and their stories about the campfire are often about you, while they admire you and will gladly follow your lead."

"Reasons enough, I should say, for taking them."

"They have another and better."

"What is it?"

"Revenge!" and she uttered the word with almost savage earnestness.

"But who are they?"

"They call themselves the Revenge Rangers."

"Where are they?"

"Come to this rendezvous the third day from this, before sunset, and you shall meet the Revenge Rangers," said the girl, earnestly.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VICTIMS OF WRONG.

Buffalo Bill was deeply impressed by the description given by Rena Redwood of the mysterious allies whom she wished him to leave there. He became interested in her story of them, and when she had appointed the time and place for him to see them he said:

"I will be here on time, if I am alive."

"They will meet you."

"But how many are they, may I ask?"

"Thirteen."

"Ah!"

"They are thirteen in reality, with no resources to draw upon."

"Like the Fatal Thirteen?"

"The Revenge Rangers, in the end, under your leadership, will be the Fatal Thirteen," she remarked, confidently.

"But, I will make fourteen, though there is luck in odd numbers, they say."

"No, they will still remain thirteen, unless you are superstitious about the number."

"No, indeed! But, how can one be added to thirteen, yet remain thirteen?"

"One will be taken away."

"To keep the number inviolate?"

"Yes; their leader will yield to you."

"That is remarkable, for leaders do not often yield."

"In this case it is different."

"Why so?"

"The leader I refer to is not capable of doing all that should be done, and realizes the fact fully."

"And admits it?"

"Yes, for, led by you, the thirteen Revenge Rangers will do their work, even though the Black Brotherhood should double, yes, treble, them in number."

"Thanks, but I do not like the idea of displacing the captain of these Revenge Rangers."

"I can give you full authority to do so."

"But, what will he say?"

"I have the say."

"And will consult him?"

"There is no need to. The Revenge Rangers work with one purpose in view—to bring to justice the Black Brotherhood. This accomplished, they will be satisfied, no matter who leads. I can vouch for the leader."

"Ah, some one very dear to you, then?"

"In some respects, yes—the leader is a woman."

"A woman?" echoed the scout, in surprise, but only to add:

"I need ask no more, for you are that woman."

"I am."

"Which fact means that you have wrongs to avenge?"

"Yes, the bitterest!" was the low, stern response.

"I felt so; the intense sadness of your face betrayed that much."

"It has betrayed but the truth. I have sorrows and sufferings I cannot speak of, and, bitter as has been the treatment of some of the Revenge Rangers, none of them have suffered as I have—none have so much to avenge."

Her face and quivering voice revealed this, and Buffalo Bill said, in all earnestness:

"You have my full sympathy, Miss Redwood; but it is strange that your brother does not avenge your wrongs, and his, for he must have suffered, as well as you."

"My brother, yes; but he can not do what I can."

"Well, you have but to command me in all I can do for you."

"I thank you. But, I am detaining you, when you are anxious to go on to Fort Verde."

"Do not think of me in the matter, for, except to find Manton Marr and his daughter, time is little to me just now."

"Find Manton Marr and his daughter?" she repeated, quickly.

He had made a slip of the tongue and saw it. He had kept back his having seen Helen Marr, wounded, and her father a madman; but he answered with no show of confusion:

"I wish to find out the truth as to just who perished in that burned cabin."

"I hope to Heaven some may have escaped; but, remember the appointment with the Revenge Rangers," and again she drew off the glove from her left hand and held it forth.

Once more he had that strange feeling as he grasped the thumbless hand of a woman; but she made no explanation, and he asked no questions.

Then she wheeled her horse suddenly and rode away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WELCOME AT FORT VERDE.

Buffalo Bill stood watching the strange girl until she disappeared in the distance.

"Well, a maimed hand on a young girl is worse than an armless man to consider; it seems so very cruel. And then there was Helen Marr badly wounded. Is it a custom for the lawless men of this country to be more cruel to women than to their own sex?"

"I must be on my way now," and he glanced about him at the little camp he had made.

It was an ideal spot for a secluded camp, with fine water, grass, and wood at hand; and, well off the trail, would not be readily found.

Leading to the spring from different directions were half a dozen deer trails. This had told the scout that water was there. Game of all kinds had made it a retreat, but there were no trails of horses and men to the place.

"I'll mark the place well in my mind," the scout decided, and, with a sharp scrutiny of the vicinity, he mounted his horse, and with the other animal in lead, carrying the dead body of his master, the pathfinder rode on his way back to the trail he had been following to the fort.

He camped for dinner at that spot, and tarried there for a couple of hours, so that the horses were well rested, having also a good time to graze.

Again mounting, he pushed on at a canter, constantly on the alert for an ambush.

Knowing the country as the Brotherhood did, and having seen how they had headed him off once before, Buffalo Bill did not care to have the same flank movement played on him again.

But he saw no foe, only here and there a herd of fleet-footed, graceful antelope that stood afar off and gazed wonderingly at him, with their large, dreamy, beautiful eyes.

As the sun neared the horizon, in the distance Fort Verde came into view.

The horses were still at a canter, and had been kept at that pace wherever the nature of the ground permitted, and as he was admitted within the fort the sunset gun was fired, flashing forth, as it were, a salute to the departing orb of day, and the coming of the King of the Border.

A sergeant was sent by the officer of the day to conduct the scout to headquarters, and Colonel Garrett was just returning there from dress parade when he beheld the scout and his led horse bearing a blanketed form of a dead man.

"What a superb specimen of manhood, Hastings!" said the colonel to his adjutant, as Buffalo Bill swung gracefully out of the saddle, threw his rein

to an orderly, and approached the two officers, giving a military salute.

"He is, indeed, sir, and a stranger to the fort. Who can he be?" answered Adjutant Hastings.

Buffalo Bill at once came up, and, after his salute, said, courteously:

"Have I the honor of addressing Colonel Garrett?"

"Yes, sir, and who is it, may I ask, that claims my acquaintanceship?" and the colonel gazed upon the handsome face and picturesque bearing of the scout with admiration.

"I am Chief of Scouts in the Northwestern Military District, sir. My name is William F. Cody, and I bear a letter to you from my commandant at Fort Fetterman, Colonel Garrett."

"Ah, yes, and I am glad to welcome you; but, is not that the name of the great plainsman and scout, known as Buffalo Bill?"

"I am the one they call Buffalo Bill, sir."

"Indeed! I might have known, as you look it, Mr. Cody. I am indeed glad to meet you."

"Let me present you to Captain Hastings, Post Adjutant."

The colonel shook the hand of the scout warmly; the adjutant did likewise; then the colonel led the way into his quarters, remarking:

"We know you well by name here, Cody, and hear much of your doings in the northwest."

"I believe you know my Chief of Scouts, Sam Hall, better known as Buckskin Sam?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you will make your quarters with him, in the young officers' row, and I hope you can remain some time at Verde."

"I expect to do so, sir, as the letter I have will explain."

"You have had trouble on the way, I see—a comrade slain?"

"No, an outlaw whom I was forced to kill."

"Ah! you begin well, indeed, in your visit to Verde."

"But, come in and we'll talk matters over," and the two officers and Buffalo Bill entered headquarters just as twilight was falling.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BOTH SIDES OF THE STORY.

Seated in Colonel Garrett's cosy quarters, Buffalo Bill gave to the commandant the letter he had brought, and which was quickly read.

"The general is most complimentary in speaking of you, Chief Cody, and says that if any man can wipe out the Black Brotherhood, it is yourself."

"This rancher, Manton Marr, I know of, yet have never met, but, having army friends in the northwest, he used his influence there to get you sent on this mission, it seems."

"Now, you have but to say in what I can aid you, and I will cheerfully do so, though our duties here are not directed toward running down outlaws, but Indians; hence the former do pretty much as they please."

"The Government thinks that the stage companies and the wagon trains should protect themselves from road-agents. There is too much red tape business before we can act, so you realize the situation."

"Perfectly, sir."

"But you are free to act as you wish, I see—a special officer for this special work; therefore, I consider myself justified in aiding you without red tape delays."

"I thank you, colonel; but you seem not to have heard of the late blow of these ranch scourges."

"No; have they been on another raid?"

Buffalo Bill told the story of the burning of Manton Marr's home, and, supposedly, the rancher, his family, and the

cowboys who were aiding in its defense, but he did not speak of the wounded girl he had met, nor of seeing Manton Marr himself, digging a grave by moonlight.

Some feeling, the same that had before suggested keeping these facts secret, restrained him from doing so, though why he could not explain to himself.

It was with almost consternation that Colonel Garrett and Captain Hastings listened to the terrible story, and the former, with white, indignant face, cried:

"Without orders, I'll put my whole force on the hunt for those inhuman wretches, and hang each one as he is taken."

"I beg pardon, Colonel Garrett, but a thousand men could not do what a dozen could, sir."

"These outlaws are men who must be right here, in our very camps, but secretly members of that heinous band, otherwise they could not constantly escape as they do."

"If they knew the soldiers were to take the field against them, they would simply become invisible."

"But, without looking for a force to pursue them they can be run down, and I believe I have a band of men that will do that work, but of this I will acquaint you within a few days, and if I need more help, call upon you, sir."

"I believe you are right, Cody, upon second thought, for thus has it been in the past, when a large force has hunted them."

"But, they number only thirteen, I have heard."

"Nominally, sir, though how many more I do not know."

"How is that?"

"Well, sir, I had a brush with them coming on, before reaching Manton Marr's ranch, and killed three of the thirteen."

"Ah! splendid work, that!"

"The number was almost immediately brought to thirteen again. Then this man, Garcia, was certainly one of the band, and yet thirteen pursued me without counting him."

"They act mysteriously, then?"

"Yes, sir, but just what their reserve supply may number I do not know, yet I am assured that the band is recruited from the ranches, settlements, and others who hang about this country, thus knowing exactly what takes place, the movements of trains, coaches carrying treasure, and where they may strike a blow with profit and little danger to themselves."

"That must be the way it is; but, tell me now what your intentions are?"

"First, to make my quarters here, sir, and thus be able to call for aid when needed, yet to go from here alone, upon the trail, among the ranches to the northward."

"In a few days I will be able to advise you what force I can collect to help me, without having to attract attention by taking men from the fort."

"If I can get once upon the real trail of the bandits, I can track them home; but they have some method of covering up their tracks that is really wonderful and which I am not able to catch on to."

"Well, do as you deem best, and call upon Verde for help when you need it."

"Outwardly, I suppose you appear here only as a bearer of dispatches."

"Yes, sir."

Buffalo Bill was conducted by the adjutant to Buckskin Sam's quarters, and the dead outlaw was left at the guard-house until morning.

Thus ended Buffalo Bill's first interview with Colonel Garrett, and the scout felt the better satisfied, for both sides of the story had been told and heard.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

Buckskin Sam was a small, wiry fellow, with long, waving, jet-black hair and eyes sparkling and penetrating, like those of an eagle.

He had made a name as a Confederate scout, and later, had become captain of a band of Texas rangers who had been taken into the United States service as guides, scouts, and Indian fighters.

The men had made a record for themselves as Buckskin Sam's Boys, and each one was to be depended upon in whatever duty he was assigned to.

"Why, Buffalo Bill, I am glad to see you," cried Buckskin Sam, when he saw the distinguished borderman enter his quarters, and heard Captain Hastings' words:

"Sam, here is an old friend for you to welcome."

Buffalo Bill was made royally welcome, and given pleasant accommodations, while a tempting supper was prepared, after which the Secret Rangers, who had heard of the new arrival, began to drop in to pay their respects to the great chief of the northwest trail finders, whom they were most anxious to see.

The two scout-chiefs were at length left to themselves, when Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Sam, for a quiet, confidential talk. How many men have you?"

"Twenty-seven, including myself, and all good as they make 'em. Want any of the boys?"

"I may, but I want you first."

"I'm ready."

"I came here with dispatches."

"Yes, but there is something behind them."

"You have heard of the burning of the Manton Marr ranch and the killing of its inmates, to-night?"

"Yes, and its a downright horror, and I am surprised that Colonel Garrett has not been driven to ordering out the whole garrison, and awaiting for orders afterward; but, then, there is so much red tape business in Government movements, I suppose he does not dare do so."

"No, he wished to; but I asked him not to, for I came here to look up these outlaws."

"That means that they are doomed."

"I am not so sure of that, but am hopeful."

"You want me to help you with my boys?"

"I want you, alone, at first, but may have to call upon you to have your boys aid me, after awhile."

"Say the word, William, and I am yours."

"I am going to tell you first why I came and all that has taken place so far."

"I'll be glad to be informed."

"As far as I could I have kept my own counsel, not making all known to Colonel Garrett even."

"I see."

"I know you from wayback, and you can help me, so I will tell you first what has been done, all I know, and ask you about one thousand questions, for I am not acquainted down here, you know."

"Just get to work, and I'll fire the answers at you double quick."

Buffalo Bill then, in a low voice, related why he had come to Arizona, and just what he had seen and discovered since his coming. He told of meeting the wounded girl, her mysterious disappearance, then his seeing the rancher who was supposed to be dead, the attempted killing of him by a foe, his return shot, the flight of the would-be murderer, and after that his being unable to find Manton Marr.

Of his meeting with the girl at the ruined house, his capture by Van Soulsby's regulators, and becoming a guest at the Redwood ranch, where Rena Redwood refused to admit that she had met him before, he also spoke.

The attempt on his life in the ranch by Pedro Garcia, the scenes of his trail the next day, with his prisoner, and at last his again meeting Miss Redwood, were also divulged, but nothing was said as to any compact made with her, only the scout adding:

"Now, did you ever hear of the Revenge Rangers, Sam?"

"Never; but I should think there would be many of them, if the people who have cause for revenge in this country should take the trail."

"Well, there is an organized band of such people, and day after to-morrow I am to meet them, and shall then ascertain who and what they are; that done, I can decide, with you, what is best to be done."

"Good as gold!"

"When I leave the fort, I wish you to start upon my trail, say, a couple of hours behind me."

"I'll do it."

"Just why I will explain."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE START ON THE TRAIL.

Buckskin Sam had listened to Buffalo Bill's well-told narrative of his trail through Arizona with the deepest interest.

He envied the scout the thrilling adventures he had encountered, and yet his only comment had been:

"You were the very man to send upon this mission, and you have begun right. You'll get there, pard."

As they talked on Buckskin Sam had told how he had been hampered in his efforts to hunt down the Black Brotherhood, and Cody had assured him that the same rules existed up in his country.

It was the civil authority constantly conflicting with and retarding the military, the real power to act.

Going on to tell his scouting comrade why he wished him to follow his trail, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, I have told you the full facts of the case, Sam, so that, should harm befall me, you will fully understand the situation and know what to do."

"I see."

"You will not be acting in the dark, but be able to carry out the plans, as formed for corralling this band of cut-throats, and I do not wish my death, should it occur, to cause the work to fail."

"I will do just as you wish throughout, Bill."

"I know that. The plan is that you follow me out of the fort, two hours after. You can start in another direction, but flank around and get upon my trail when out of sight of those whose interest it may be to watch you."

"Yes, that is best."

"I'll mark my trail well, where it is necessary, and so not cause you any delay in searching for it where it may be dim."

"All right."

"If you find a cross marked in the trail, that means that you are to go slow and halt for an hour or so, for there is no knowing what I may run upon."

"But if you find a hand marked in the trail, push on rapidly, though with caution."

"I understand."

"My first duty is to find out the Revenge Rangers, and see just what they are, or are not, worth to me; then I will see you, and we will have a talk. After that, if I work with the Revenge Rangers, or with you alone, I shall make it my business to find Manton Marr and his daughter Helen."

"That must be done, sure."

"Yes, and in finding them we will be on the trail of the Black Brotherhood as well."

"Now, tell me what you know about Van Soulsby's Regulators?"

"A good fellow is Van, daring and clever, and he has a lot of good men to follow him; but they are cowboys, not scouts, and he does his best with the material he has, and certainly keeps the outlaws in check to a certain extent."

"I confess that I liked him very much, in spite of his desire to hang me."

"But what of Rupert Redwood?"

"A fine fellow, too, and rich, with as beautiful a sister as one would wish to see, as you know."

"But hotheaded."

"Yes, wild as an antelope and reckless as the devil. If he got a chance at the outlaw band he would count no odds and fight like a demon, and he has imparted his spirit to his men, who are all a lot of dare-devils."

"Why, his attempt to shoot his cowboy chief in his home, before his sister, when he found what he had done to you, shows what a reckless fellow he is."

"It does, indeed; but, was he the accepted suitor of Helen Marr, that you know of?"

"God knows what a woman intends to do, Bill, or not to do. She seemed to care for Redwood, but then it was said that Van Soulsby was a dangerous rival of his; that is the gossip of the camps, at least. Women go by contraries, and Miss Helen Marr had her pick in Arizona, you know, and a strong pull upon the army officers, too, who were in love with her and her money as well; but, she is a noble girl, for I cannot believe her dead, and I hope she will not throw herself away upon any one unworthy of her, if, poor young lady, she is rescued from those Satan's Imps, and you are the man to do that, Bill, and will."

"I will rest here to-morrow, and to-morrow night, Sam, starting upon my trail the next morning at dawn, and you now know just what to do."

"Yes, I've got all points down fine, and there must be no mistake."

"None."

"You wish the colonel to know that I follow you, however, or do you wish him to think I merely start off on a scout of my own?"

"He must know, Sam, but no one else."

"It is best."

It was after midnight, so the friends retired to their blankets; but Buffalo Bill on the day after made an early start to go to the appointed rendezvous made with Miss Redwood, to meet the Revenge Rangers.

An hour after his departure, Buckskin Sam rode away in an opposite direction, but, flanking around, picked up his trail and followed it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE WARNING.

Buffalo Bill left Fort Verde in good time to keep his appointment with Miss Redwood, when he was to meet those whom she had called the Revenge Rangers.

The scout was anxious to see and know just what they were, and was fully aware of their great value as allies, if they were what they were represented to be by their fair captain.

Numbering, as she had said, thirteen, and all being men who had known what it was to bitterly suffer under the cruel persecutions of the Black Brotherhood, they would be just the ones to take the trail under his, Buffalo Bill's, lead.

Then, too, the fort, the ranchers, and the regulators would all doubtless be watched by the outlaws, to see that they were not set upon their trail, after their frightful holocaust at the cabin of Manton Marr.

The scouts of Buckskin Sam would also be kept under espionage, to see if they were ordered on their trail, and they had more cause to fear these rangers than any one else, should the commandant of Fort Verde put them on the duty of hunting down the Black Brotherhood.

Buffalo Bill was therefore most anxious for the men he was to meet at the little camp, to prove just what he needed in his work of bringing the guilty ones to just punishment.

He was glad to have made Buckskin Sam his bower in the work, for he knew how thoroughly he was able to rely upon the Texan, and, if need came for them, the army scouts under his command could be readily brought into use.

Soldiers could not move without notice, and if they did their coming would be

heralded very quickly, so that they would be of little use in hunting outlaws.

With great hope of success, now that he was embarked in the work of ferreting out the outlaws, and with such allies as he expected to command, Buffalo Bill left Verde in the full belief that the trail would be followed to the end.

He had held a long talk with Colonel Garrett, and that officer had told him to call upon him for all the aid he needed, and added:

"Now that you are upon the trail of this band of outlaws, Cody, I feel that their doom is sealed."

Taking the trail he had come, as though bearing back return dispatches, Buffalo Bill rode away from Fort Verde, having made a most favorable impression with all who had heard much of, yet had never before seen the great scout.

He soon dropped the fort out of sight, and begun to turn his attention to the trail ahead.

His time of departure had been kept a secret, but it was well known that he was not to remain long at the fort, and there were those who would be only too anxious to head him off and hold him up, if not kill him.

This he knew, and he was correspondingly cautious not to be entrapped.

He had fitted himself out at Verde, between the commissary, quartermaster, and sutler, with all he needed for a long trail, hot fighting, and comfort in camping, along with provisions, for he was a good liver when good food was to be had, yet never grumbled when he had to live upon the worst, or nothing at all, if it was in the discharge of duty.

He had ridden some twenty miles from the fort, when he suddenly saw a band of antelope flying along a couple of miles away from him.

He saw them dash along at the foot of a range, but suddenly make a wide and startled swerve away from some rocks that lay right by the side of his trail.

There was a pine tree there, and about it was a group of boulders, several of them being six or eight feet in height.

They were closely grouped together, and the trail led around them; but from the further side they were open, and any one hiding there could have been seen from the ridge beyond.

The antelopes were dashing along on a line that would have carried them on the further side, but suddenly they swerved far away from them and passed between the rocks and the scout, thus continuing their flight up the valley.

"I could bring one of you down easily, but I'll spare you and go without my steak, for you have just saved me from riding upon an ambush, for there are men hiding among those rocks," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XL.

THE FOE UNEARTHED.

A man reared as Buffalo Bill has been, to look for danger in every sound, every movement, naturally saw something to dread in the sudden swerving of the band of antelopes from their direct course.

They had scented danger in that group of rocks.

It was not then danger to them, but to the scout.

Those who lurked there were after human game just then.

But the scout read the sign and at once decided to profit by it.

He did not make a movement to indicate that he had even observed the act of the antelopes.

Twice he raised his rifle, as though to bring down one of them, but lowered it with the air of one who thought that a shot would be a miss.

He felt eyes were upon him, and so this was but acting.

He could readily have brought down one of the beautiful creatures, for he was within easy range.

After they had passed he kept straight on his way, as before.

But he kept his eye upon the rocks. He was measuring the distance perfectly, having no intention to get within too close range of a rifle.

If there was some one in ambush there, and he was sure of the fact, whoever it might be would allow him to come very near before firing, perhaps attempt to hold him up before doing so.

So on he kept along the trail, and his eyes were taking in the situation.

He saw that the base of the ridge beyond the rocks was fully a couple of hundred yards distant.

Here and there the ridge was broken by clumps of cedars and boulders, affording a safe retreat.

On either side of the lone tree and the surrounding rocks there was no place of refuge, the scout observed.

Keeping on his course in the even tenor of his way, Buffalo Bill approached to within a couple of hundred yards of the lone tree.

Then he suddenly grasped his reins, swerved to the right, and at a full run started to flank the rocks, making for the ridge the other side.

That he had studied the situation well was very quickly proven, for the heads of two men appeared above the largest boulder, a couple of rifles were thrust over, and aim that might have been deadly was taken at the flying scout.

But he had planned for this, and as he dashed along his repeating rifle began to rattle shot after shot.

The shots were aimed as well as they could be by the scout riding at full speed, and they so incessantly and rapidly rained upon the top of the rock, and with such true aim, that one of the men dropped back with his rifle discharging as he fell, while his companion pulled trigger quickly without seeking a good aim.

While he was firing the scout was going like the very wind, his horse at full speed, and circling the spot of ambush.

He was riding for one of the breaks in the ridge already spoken of, and was not long in gaining its shelter.

Placing his horse under shelter of a boulder, he sprang to shelter himself, and a glance showed him that he was master of the situation.

He had the two men in the rear.

He had completely and quickly flanked their position.

One of the men lay upon the ground motionless, and near him two horses were hitched.

The other had dashed around the boulder for protection, but his rifle was all he had.

He had left his horse, his provisions, blankets, and comrade behind, and in full view of the scout.

And his comrade was dead, or, if not, utterly helpless.

How long could he stand a siege was the question that he had to confront.

If until night, he might escape, for his chances were good if the scout left his shelter to advance upon him.

"Ho, pard, come out and surrender, thus saving time and trouble," shouted Buffalo Bill.

"I'll see yer in Hades first," was the very decided answer.

"All right."

"I'll give you just two hours to decide, and then down go your horses and then you are on foot."

The man evidently realized the truth of this, but did not surrender, and the scout quietly sat down to await the coming of Buckskin Sam, whom he felt very sure was then on his trail, and would drive the fellow into a position between two fires.

CHAPTER XLI.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

With the patience of an Indian Buffalo Bill sat down to await the coming of Buckskin Sam.

He might be a little late at the rendezvous with the Revenge Rangers, but he would get there as soon as he could.

He was anxious to take this man alive, to discover just who he was, and see why the attempt on his life was made.

So he calmly waited.

Twice the man behind the rocks called out to him to make terms.

"If you'll draw off, I'll go with my pard and call it quits," he said.

"No!"

It was the only reply.

Again came a call to make terms.

"I'll go and leave yer ther outfit, dead man and all, if yer'll let me hev my horse."

"No!"

The scout at last begun to turn his eyes across the valley.

He had them miles back on the trail he had come.

At last he was rewarded by seeing a horseman appear in sight.

A look through his glass, and he said: "It is Buckskin Sam, and he is just in time."

"Yes, he will be here just two hours behind me," and he glanced at his watch.

On came Buckskin Sam, and his eyes were roaming ahead and upon the trail.

The man behind the rocks did not see him.

He was not looking for danger in that direction.

All he had to fear he thought was in his front.

Before the eyes of the scout still lay that motionless form.

If not dead, he was playing his part admirably, Buffalo Bill decided.

Nearer and nearer Buckskin Sam came.

Would he discover that man at the rocks?

If not he must be warned.

The fellow might see him, might have found some hiding place, and fire upon the Verde scout.

Buffalo Bill was preparing to warn him with a shot, when he saw Sam stop, and then ride to the right, making a flank movement as he had done.

But he had started much further back than he had.

At this he raised his voice and shouted:

"Ho, Sam, I've got him corralled on this side, and he's between two fires."

As quick as a flash Buckskin Sam was out of his saddle, a word to his horse, and the animal had dropped upon his side, and using him for a breastwork, with his repeating rifle pointed over his saddle, he called out:

"Hands up, there, or I'll put daylight through you!"

The man had at first believed Buffalo Bill's call was to him, but quickly realized his mistake.

But too late, for Buckskin Sam was already down and sheltered, his rifle covering him, and he was fully exposed to his fire.

He was indeed between two fires.

Up went his hands, and Buffalo Bill heard his frightened cry:

"Don't shoot!"

"I is doomed, and knows it, too!"

"Walk out from that boulder into full view of both of us!" cried Buckskin Sam.

"I'll do it."

"Leave your rifle and belt of arms behind you!"

"Thar they is," and the weapons were laid down by the rock.

"No funny business, mind you, or you'll get into trouble."

"I knows that, you bet."

With this the man stepped out into full view of Buffalo Bill.

"Hands up, I told you!"

They were quickly raised.

Buffalo Bill now advanced on foot, and the two scouts met at the ambush.

"Well, Sam, I was waiting for you, as this fellow had the rocks on me; but I guess his pard is all right yonder, as through firing at random I think I wounded him."

"They laid for you here, Bill?"

"Yes, but a herd of antelopes dodged the place, and gave me warning."

"Good!"

"But where is this fellow's pard, for this one is about the worst man in Arizona, unless it's the fellow I expect is with him?"

"He lies behind the rocks yonder—ha!"

As Buffalo Bill uttered the words he saw Buckskin Sam suddenly drop on one knee, throw his rifle to his shoulder, and fire.

He had fired at a horseman who was dashing away two hundred yards distant and shielded by the group of boulders.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRISONERS' DUMB GUARD.

The shot of Buckskin Sam was a deadly one.

The man tumbled from his saddle.

The horse, released of his rider, circled around and went back to his comrade at the rocks, then uttered a glad neigh, and trotted up to Buckskin Sam at his call.

"My own horse, Bill, which those fellows stole from me a week or so ago," said Sam.

"The man was not dead after all, but played 'possum well, for he lay motionless on his back for two hours."

"Yes, and I'll be sure he's dead now, for he's as tricky as a coyote," and they walked toward the man, taking the prisoner with them.

He was dead.

He lay upon his face, and the bullet of Buckskin Sam had cut through his neck.

"As I thought," said the Verde scout, turning him over.

"He is the man you thought?"

"Yes."

"And there is what your shot did," and Buckskin Sam pointed to a fresh wound in the top of the man's head.

The bullet of Buffalo Bill had cut along the top, grazing the skull, and leaving an ugly wound.

"It had doubtless stunned him, Bill, and knowing you were about, when he came too he played 'possum to get you when you came up, or to escape, if he could."

"Yes, Sam, and skipped when we were busy with this fellow."

"That's what he did."

"Will you go back to Verde with them?"

"Fortunately, I don't have to."

"How is that?"

"You saw my horse come up to me just now?"

"Yes."

"There are no better in the country than that horse, and he can do all but talk."

"But he looks fagged now."

"Yes."

"This other horse belongs to Colonel Garrett, and it nearly broke the colonel's heart when he was stolen."

"I am glad he'll get him back."

"Like mine, he's trained, and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"Write the colonel a note and send it by my horse, and you can go right on, as I happen to know you are in a hurry."

"I will be glad to do so, Sam."

With this Buffalo Bill and Buckskin Sam securely bound the prisoner, and then the former mounted his horse and rode rapidly away on his trail, for he knew that he would be behind time in keeping his appointment.

After Buffalo Bill had departed Buckskin Sam thought for a moment, and said to his prisoner:

"Now I think of it, Nat Low, I'll send you to Verde, and your dead pard with you, for if anything should detain the party to be sent after you, and night come on, the coyotes might eat you, and bad as you are I don't want that."

The man shuddered, and Buckskin Sam ordered him to mount, meaning his own

horse, which the outlaw had stolen from him.

The man hesitated, but a prick with the point of his bowie knife made him obey with promptness.

"Now, Nat Low, why did you attempt Buffalo Bill's life?"

"We didn't know him."

"I do not believe you, for I think you were sent out to kill him by some one at the fort."

"Tain't so."

"I believe you and your dead pard are secret members of the Black Brotherhood band, and I shall so state in my note to Colonel Garrett."

"Lordy! don't do that, Sam, for horse stealing is the worst we have done, leastwise me, though my pard were a leetle wickeder."

"You were both alike."

With this Buckskin Sam sat down and with a pencil wrote a note to Colonel Garrett, in which he explained the whole affair.

Then he ordered the man to dismount again, and the note, addressed to the colonel, was firmly pinned upon his breast.

The next move of the Verde scout was to make a gag, and this he thrust firmly into the mouth of his prisoner.

Again the man was forced to mount, his legs were secured beneath the horse, the reins were tied up securely, and next Buckskin Sam turned his attention to the dead man.

The body was strapped across the saddle of the animal stolen from Colonel Garrett, and the two horses were tied bit and bit, and started upon the trail for the fort.

They went off at a canter, the prisoner writhing in his saddle, and Buckskin Sam watched them until they disappeared from sight, four or five miles away.

Then he mounted his horse and once more followed on the trail of Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO PASSERS-BY.

Miss Redwood was ahead of time in reaching the rendezvous appointed with Buffalo Bill to meet the Revenge Rangers.

She had hoped to find the scout already there, for she wished to have a talk with him.

But he was delayed, as the reader knows.

From some reason she could not account for, her Revenge Rangers were also delayed.

It was strange, for they were always prompt.

She had hitched her horse, and was pacing to and fro when she heard hoof-falls approaching.

At once she was upon her guard.

She knew that she might find a foe there as well as a friend.

She crouched down into the thicket near where she stood and waited.

The hoof-falls fell louder and louder and the horseman came on at a canter, for there was but one.

Another moment and he appeared in full view.

She started as she saw that he was dressed in black, was masked, and she knew that he was one of the Black Brotherhood.

Were others following him?

Would he pass and not see her or her horse?

She had not gone direct to the little camp appointed as a rendezvous with Buffalo Bill, but had halted a short distance before reaching it.

But she hoped she would not be seen, and so she crouched low down in her place of concealment.

The man continued on at a canter, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

She muttered a deep sigh of relief as she felt that he had gone by and had not seen her.

But were there others to follow?

Quickly she arose and led her horse into deeper concealment.

Hardly had she done so when she again heard the sound of hoofs.

She at once rushed to her place of hiding.

Were other men of the Black Brotherhood band coming, or were her own men near?

There she waited and watched.

Nearer came the hoof-falls.

Soon a horseman came into sight.

He was riding at a gallop, leaning over in his saddle and was watching the ground as he went along.

He was directly upon the trail of the masked horseman, who had gone along ten minutes before him.

The girl uttered a moan as she beheld the second horseman, for she had recognized him.

It was Rupert Redwood, the young rancher.

He passed within two hundred feet of the crouching girl, but she gave no sign of recognition.

It seemed very evident that she was there without Rupert Redwood's permission, that she did not wish to be seen by him.

Her face was deathly white, and she trembled violently, as though in great fear of being discovered by her brother.

But he rode on at a gallop, his eyes downcast upon the trail he was following.

He neither saw nor suspected her presence there, that was certain.

When he had passed her by unseen she gave another deep sigh of relief.

Then she buried her face in her hands and uttered a moan of both bodily and mental pain, seemingly.

Thus she remained for a few moments, and was rising to her feet, when suddenly she was startled by hearing a distant shot.

"My God! what does that mean?" she cried.

Then for the first time she seemed to realize that the trail taken by the masked man in black was the very one leading to Fort Verde.

It was the very one that Buffalo Bill must come along to reach the rendezvous.

And along that trail had gone Rupert Redwood, following the Man in Black.

Who had fired that shot?

What did it mean?

Had it been fired by the Man in Black at his pursuer, Rupert Redwood, or had the latter killed the man he pursued?

And again, thought the girl:

"Was Buffalo Bill the one who fired that shot, or had it been fired at the scout?"

None of these questions could the girl answer, and in the midst of her quandary she again heard hoofs approaching.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE MASKED HORSEMAN.

After leaving Buckskin Sam to dispose of the dead man and the prisoner as he deemed best, and then continue on after him, Buffalo Bill rode at a rapid lope mile after mile.

He was anxious to be on time at the rendezvous, and not keep Miss Redwood and her band of Revenge Rangers waiting.

The pace he kept up pretty steadily, but halted at times when he approached another ambush, and flanked several excellent covers for an enemy.

At last he neared the rendezvous, but somewhat behind time, in spite of his rapid ride.

Another mile would bring him to his little camp of several days before, when suddenly he faintly heard the sound of hoofs.

At once he was on his guard. It might be the fair maid of the hacienda, or it might be an enemy.

He at once withdrew from the trail to the shelter of a thicket, and just in time,

for quickly there appeared over the ridge a horseman.

"A Man in Black, and no mistake! Are there others following? Now to business! I want him!—want him alive! He is my game or I am his."

So deciding, the scout unslung his long lariat, and his horse perfectly quiet, he waited.

Concealed as he was by the thick pines, the Black Rider would approach without suspicion.

The man, when first heard, had been riding in a gallop, but as he came near he suddenly halted, as if undecided as to which of two trails to take.

The scout anxiously awaited his decision, but he had not long to wait, for, in a moment, the Man in Black turned to listen, as though hearing a sound behind him on the trail.

Thus he stood for quite a long while, but at length started on again, taking the trail that led by the waiting scout.

Intently watching his man, as he drew nearer, Buffalo Bill did not see a second horseman appear in the trail behind and coming over the ridge.

Nearer advanced the Man in Black, and the lariat of the scout begun to make its whirls in the air, preparatory to being thrown.

Another moment and the scout launched the line, and, cast unerringly, the loop settled over the man's head, to be instantly drawn taut.

Out of the saddle the Man in Black was dragged, falling with considerable force, while Buffalo Bill spurred toward him, halting quickly and dismounting.

As he did so a shot was heard, some distance off, and the captured man fell forward on his face, dead!

A bullet had cut through his body!

Buffalo Bill was upon his guard instantly, for the shot was a surprise to him.

He saw, not two hundred yards away, and riding toward him, rifle in hand, no other than the young rancher, Rupert Redwood!

He it was who had fired the shot that killed the Man in Black.

Buffalo Bill's face flushed angrily, and he called out:

"Why did you kill this man, Mr. Redwood?"

"Why, to aid you, Mr. Cody, for, catching, as you did, with your lasso, I supposed from some cause, you were unarmed."

"No, I caught him purposely, as I wished to have him alive; but I thank you for your desire to serve me, though I fear we have lost a good chance to get the information we wanted about the Black Brotherhood."

"Do you know the man?" and Buffalo Bill drew the black mask from the dead man's head and face.

"My God, yes!"

"He is one of my most trusted cow-boys!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

Buffalo Bill was by no means pleased at the turn affairs had taken.

He had caught his man fairly with the lasso, but lost him by a shot from Rupert Redwood's rifle.

He had come to that spot to see Miss Redwood, but here was her brother, from whom she wished to conceal the part she was playing as leader of the Revenge Rangers; therefore Rupert was the very last man he wished to see, just then.

But, there he was, and hardly a mile away was the sister, waiting for the scout's coming.

Did the brother know of the rendezvous? Had he also come there to meet him?

Buffalo Bill felt that he must act with caution, so said:

"I saw the fellow coming, so lay in

wait to capture him and lead him to your hacienda."

"I had been following him for some time, and was within sight of him when your lasso shot out and caught him, so of course I fired, when I saw him struggling to his feet."

"It is too bad; but I thank you just the same for your intention to serve me. Now that I have met you, Mr. Redwood, I'll not go by your home, but push right on my trail."

"Why, no! You must not go by the ranch, for we will be delighted to see you, and by a cross trail it is not so far, you know, from here."

"Thank you, but I will push on. You will see to the burial of this man, for you say he is one of your cowboys."

"Yes, one of my most trusted men, Garcia was. A person hardly knows who to trust in this country, as their best friends may secretly be members of the Black Brotherhood."

"Have you made any discovery since I saw you?"

"My intention is to take the Black Brotherhood trail, independent of Van Soulsby and his regulators, and I was out collecting men when I came upon this man and followed him."

"But, what did Colonel Garret think of the Manton Marr murder?"

"Naturally, he was horrified, but he wisely says soldiers are not the ones to hunt outlaws with."

"I will aid you in putting the body upon the horse, and then push on, for I am in somewhat of a hurry."

This the scout did, though Rupert Redwood protested that he could do it alone.

Buffalo Bill insisted, for reasons of his own, and aided in the search of the body.

Much to their surprise, they found a lot of papers and a bag of gold, jewelry, and gems.

Redwood was astounded, for he cried: "Why, these belong to my sister, while the gold and the papers are mine! The scoundrel must have stolen these before leaving the hacienda, though how he did so is a mystery to me."

"I am indeed fortunate in regaining them, and my sister will feel the deepest gratitude to you, Mr. Cody, as I do."

"I am glad the valuables were recovered, sir," and Buffalo Bill added:

"I leave all in your hands, Mr. Redwood, and must now bid you good-by!"

"I am very sorry to part with you, Mr. Cody, and my sister will be disappointed not to have you come by our home, but I suppose you know best."

"I wish you well, sir, and hope we may some day meet again. I trust I may be able to send you word before long that the Black Brotherhood band has been wiped out, and poor Helen Marr and her family avenged."

"I hope so, indeed; but that reminds me to ask about the burial of the bodies found in the ashes of the burned ranch."

"All were decently buried, sir."

"How many did you find?"

"Just ten, which accounted for Mr. Marr, his wife, and Helen, the two negroes, and five cowboys, who had rallied there to defend the place."

"It was a sad fate, indeed, for them, and may they be more than avenged is my prayer!" fervently said Buffalo Bill.

Then he shook hands with the young rancher and rode on his way.

Getting over the ridge, he dismounted and walked back, fearful that Rupert Redwood might suspect his intended meeting with his sister from some reason, and be on the watch, for it certainly was a coincidence to meet him there, though the trailing of the outlaw had apparently explained it.

He beheld the rancher riding away on the trail that led him homeward, leading the horse of the outlaw, the body being strapped upon the saddle.

Confident that the young ranch owner was really not shadowing him, Buffalo Bill once more resumed his way to the rendezvous.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

For some time the scout rode on, yet kept looking behind, for he still suspected that Rupert Redwood might be following him.

As far as he himself was concerned, he did not care, and would rather have let the young rancher know about his meeting with his sister, but he could not betray her confidence, and so must guard her secret.

At last he halted for some minutes, and then, convinced that he was wrong in his suspicion about Rupert having discovered his sister's intention, he pushed on and soon reached the little camp.

The young girl was there awaiting him, and was alone.

This he was sorry to discover, as he decided that the Revenge Rangers had not been able to get there.

Courteously saluting Miss Redwood, he dismounted and asked, as he took the gloved hand that she extended:

"Are your Revenge Rangers not here, Miss Redwood?"

"Not yet, and it worries me greatly, for I cannot understand their delay; but you also are late, so I begun to grow anxious about you."

"Yes, I was twice detained on the trail."

"Did anything go wrong?" she asked, nervously.

"Well, yes."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Certainly. Two men ambushed me, and one was killed, the other made prisoner, and is now on his way to the fort."

"You had help, then?"

"Yes, Buckskin Sam, an old friend of mine, and Chief of Scouts at Verde."

"He came after me, and was in time to serve me well, so I left the dead man and prisoner with him."

"You were most fortunate to escape with your life."

"I am generally lucky, Miss Redwood; but, I have a surprise for you."

"Ah! another?"

"Do not be anxious, for the danger is over now."

"Then I am interested?"

"Yes. Did you hear a shot some little while ago?"

"I thought that I did, but was not sure."

"I intended to ask you about it, for I am particularly anxious, having seen a Man in Black ride by here, and close upon his trail no other person than Rupert Redwood."

"Yes, I met them both."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"With what result?"

"I lassoed the outlaw, to take him alive, but just as I was about to secure him your brother, whom I did not before see, believing my life in danger, shot him dead."

"Ah!"

"Then you could not get your hoped-for information from your prisoner?"

"No, I am sorry to say."

"But what was my brother's reason for killing your prisoner?"

"He seemed to feel that I was unarmed, as I used my lariat, and that my life was in danger, so killed the man at long range with his rifle."

"Yes, he is always very quick to use a weapon, and a dead shot, too."

"But where is he?"

She asked the last question with considerable nervousness.

"He went on to his home, carrying the body with him."

"I am glad."

"But are you sure?"

"Yes, I watched and waited until I felt sure that he was not here on your account."

"No, no, he did not know, could not know."

"It was only a coincidence."

"Did you see the face of the dead man?"

"Yes, and your brother recognized the man."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, as one of his most trusted cattlemen."

"A man who was also one of the Black Brotherhood?"

"So it seems."

"It is a pity he killed him."

"Yes, it was a cause of deep regret to me, under the circumstances."

"But the man was a thief and a traitor as well, for we found upon his body valuable papers, jewels, and gold he had stolen from your brother and yourself."

"The more, on that account, do I regret that he did not allow you to take him alive."

"Yes, but his will to help me was good, so I do not complain."

"But how about your Revenge Rangers?"

"I cannot understand their delay."

"You appointed this rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"And there was no mistake in the time?"

"None."

"I saw the messenger who reports for orders to me, and not only told him, but wrote a note to the one who leads them in the field."

"Then they should be here, unless some harm befell your messenger."

"I had not thought of that."

"But, if he went through all right, they will come, no matter what may detain them."

"Then let me tell you a secret while we wait for them, for I know that I can trust you fully now, and you should know all."

"I will be glad to know anything that you care to make known to me—but, hark!"

"They are coming now, Miss Redwood, or some one is."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE REVENGE RANGERS.

The quick ear of Buffalo Bill had caught the sound of hoofs.

He listened attentively for an instant and then said:

"Yes, they are coming, for a dozen horses at least, make that sound."

"And yet I do not hear anything?"

"Your ear is not attuned as is mine, to catch every sound, and—"

"Ah, yes, I hear them now."

"But suppose they are not the rangers?"

"Unless they see my fresh trail leading here they will doubtless pass on."

"And should they come here?"

"You can mount and readily escape, if they be foes, for you have a fine horse, I notice."

"Yes, as fleet as a deer."

"But I would not desert you."

"It would be far better that you be not seen, than to have us seen together."

"True; but would you remain to fight them, should they be outlaws?"

"No, only to stand them off until your escape was assured, and I could then get away."

"If it comes to that, I will return here each day at noon until I meet you again."

"That be the arrangement, then."

"Now go, and be near your horse, please."

She obeyed, and Buffalo Bill awaited the coming horsemen.

They were advancing in a trot, and were not far off now.

The trail, if they kept to it, would lead them by within several hundred yards, and unless they noticed, if not the Revenge Rangers, that there was a fresh trail leading up the little valley, they would doubtless continue on their way.

If they were the Revenge Rangers they would surely branch off toward the camp.

At last they came in sight of the scout,

and were seen indistinctly through the trees.

They were riding at a brisk trot, and in single file.

A moment more the leader wheeled off the trail, the others following, and clear rang the voice of the fair maid of the ranch:

"They are the rangers!"

As she spoke she advanced toward the spot where the scout stood, and the eyes of the horsemen falling upon her, they all raised their sombreros with marked respect.

Just then the eyes of the party fell upon Buffalo Bill, and instantly they repeated the salute given to their fair leader.

The scout raised his sombrero and bowed, saying, in his deep, mellow voice: "I am glad to see you, comrades."

"And I to introduce my brave rangers to the distinguished borderman they all know so well by the name of Buffalo Bill," said the girl.

The scout gazed with interest upon the men.

It was a look that took their measure from head to foot, and they realized the fact.

He saw, in the first place, that each man was splendidly mounted, equipped, and armed.

They looked prepared for hard riding, camping, and trailing if need be.

But the men?

They were darkly bronzed by exposure, they wore their hair long, and their faces indicated indomitable pluck and will.

Perfect horsemen they were, well-formed fellows, and it took but a glance of Buffalo Bill's eyes to see that they were men to tie to, come what may.

There was not the light, devil-care look about them that plainsmen so often wear, but an expression of seriousness to sadness seemed stamped upon each face.

They were men bent on one stern resolve, and not to be lightly turned from their purpose.

One, the leader, was a man of sixty, with gray hair and mustache, and another was a boy of sixteen.

Then there were others, both youthful and along in years.

They had been picked as men who had been made to suffer by the cruelties of the Black Brotherhood, and were banded together by the stern demand of vengeance.

But why should a woman, a young girl, lead such men in their work of revenge.

This was Buffalo Bill's first thought.

He did not know that she had suffered, save in the loss of her beautiful and loving friend, Helen Marr.

And yet she had organized the Revenge Rangers, the scout remembered, before the burning of the home of Manton Marr.

The scout could not just understand it.

But was this not the secret that the girl had intended to tell him, when the coming of the rangers had checked her words?

Buffalo Bill judged that it must be, and then turned to await the pleasure of the fair maid of the ranch.

"You are late, Comrade Custer," she said to the eldest of the band, who were just twelve in number.

"I had begun to feel anxious about you."

"Yes, fair captain, we had a startling adventure on our way, which I wish to tell you of," was the reply, and the looks of the speaker showed that something out of the usual run had impressed him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SCOUT CAPTAIN.

"Dismount, comrades, and go into camp, for together we have nothing to fear, and I wish you to hear what I have to say."

"But first, Comrade Custer, let me hear what you have to report," and the

young girl appealed to the oldest man of the party.

He glanced at Buffalo Bill and said:

"Your note to me, fair comrade, stated that you would have one here with you of whom we all knew, and that each one would be glad to meet."

"It stated that it was Buffalo Bill, and you would explain all when we met you here."

"But am I to tell my story before him, or not?"

"Yes, we are to have no secrets from this gentleman, for he is the one who is to lead you on the avenging trail."

"God bless him!" said a voice, fervently, and then followed from the others an earnest:

"Amen!"

"Well, comrade, we have discovered that Rancher Manton Marr was not burned with the others in his cabin."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is."

"But how do you know this, for surely it was reported that all perished in the flames."

"It is a mistake, for Manton Marr did not."

"In some mysterious way he escaped."

"Well, I hope it may be true; but what proof have you of it?"

"We have seen him," was the reply.

"You have seen him?" asked the girl, in great surprise.

"Yes."

"Then he is alive?"

"He is."

"And why has he not shown himself, come to those who could sympathize with him in his sorrows?"

"Alas, he is, I fear, crazed by his grief."

"Poor fellow!"

"But you cared for him, I sincerely hope."

"On the contrary, fair comrade, we were unable to do so."

"Is he wounded, or dying?"

"No; we came upon him suddenly, as we passed through a canyon, and he was digging a grave."

"Ah!"

"He saw us and fled like a deer, carrying his pick and shovel with him."

"This is sad, indeed."

"We called to him, told him we were friends, and then several of our fleetest mounted men tried to catch him."

"But in vain, for he escaped us in the timber and could not be found."

"If he has gone mad, better had it been had he perished with the others, poor man, for great must be his sufferings."

"But you are sure, Comrade Custer, that there could be no mistake about its being Rancher Marr?"

"None, for we all know him well, and all I can say is that it is our duty to find and care for him now, this being done even before we strike the blow we are prepared to against the Black Brotherhood."

"Yes, that duty is plain."

"But now let us know what our new captain has to say," and the girl turned to Buffalo Bill.

The latter had listened attentively to all that had been said about the men having seen Manton Marr.

He knew that it must be true, for he, too, had seen him.

He had also been taking in individually and collectively each man of the band.

He had read in the face of all stern determination to do and dare anything to redress their wrongs at the hands of their merciless foes.

All of them had been made to suffer in one way or another, and each one was determined to avenge those wrongs.

He could not get a better band to follow him he well knew, even though he had brought his own trusted scouts with him from the northwest.

They were to be depended upon, were these dozen wronged men, and more, they knew the country thoroughly and had a good cause to enlist in, not only

from avenging loved ones, but to wipe out a lot of desperadoes who held mercy for neither man nor woman in their greed for gold.

"These men will do," he mused.

"I could have no better, and I will be proud to command them."

"If I mistake not, the Black Brotherhood are nearing the end of their rope."

With this he turned to the girl who had appealed to him, and who was somewhat anxiously awaiting his decision, to see if he was satisfied with her band of Revenge Rangers.

All eyes were upon him as he spoke and each ear caught his words:

"I feel honored at the position given me, as captain of the Revenge Rangers, and if they are satisfied to have me lead them, we will start upon the trail of the Black Brotherhood at once."

CHAPTER L.

A FAIR MASCOT.

The Revenge Rangers could hardly be restrained from a rousing cheer when Buffalo Bill accepted the command of their band, and, led by the young girl in the act, each one of them stepped forward and warmly grasped his hand.

Then Miss Redwood said:

"Comrades, I feel now that the end we have sought is at hand, and not through my act do you gain your revenge for the wrongs you have suffered."

"I have been only an humble instrument in a certain way, and I resign all rights to our distinguished friend here, and far better is it so, for I did not wish that my hand should strike the death-blow, if it could be avoided."

"A woman's hand was not made for vengeance, but she can profit well by the blows of brave men, such as you are."

"I have a secret I have kept from you all."

"I shall still keep it, for it is best; but in good time you will know all, and then you will appreciate my position."

"Remember, I am with you heart and soul in this work, and call upon me as before when I can be of service."

"But, you will now follow the lead of Buffalo Bill, and, as before, you will still number thirteen, as he takes my place."

"Now, we will let him say what his wishes are, and then I will go my way."

She had spoken in a low, earnest tone, and Mr. Custer replied:

"We are not to give you up, comrade, only have Mr. Cody for our captain, for he can lead us to success."

"We remember how you sought us out, one by one, in our despair, and organized us into the band we now form, and if not our leader, you will surely be our mascot."

This idea seemed to please the girl, and the men as well, the former replying:

"Yes, I will be your mascot, and Mr. Cody your captain."

"He will lead you to the bitter end, be what it may, for he came to Arizona to do this very thing he now undertakes, to run down that outlaw band."

"Now, Mr. Cody, we will hear what your wishes are."

Again appealed to, Buffalo Bill said:

"Let me say that our fair mascot is right, for it was Manton Marr who wrote for me to come here and aid in tracking down this fiendish band."

"I was detailed for this special work, and meeting Miss Redwood, I was so fortunate as to get you men as my allies."

"I am more than content, and I will tell you now that I have a comrade in the good work with me."

"It is one who will follow our trail, to see that we are not dogged by the outlaws, and he will be within call to return to the fort for aid, should we need it, though I did not deem it best to bring any force from there, knowing that we were closely watched by spies."

"You were wise, sir," said Mr. Custer.

"The outlaws have spies everywhere, and they will look for men from the

fort to take their trail, after this last inhuman deed of theirs.

"Not seeing them leave the fort, they will believe that Colonel Garrett cannot act without orders, and so their fear of being hunted will be allayed."

"That was the view I took, and it will give us the better chance to act."

"It surely will, sir."

"Now, pards, I have said that I came here through letters from Manton Marr, and I wish to add that he was an old friend of mine."

"In coming here, when nearing the end of my trail, I came upon a strange sight, which I will tell you of."

Then Buffalo Bill told of meeting the wounded girl, who could have been no other than Helen Marr, of his leaving her to lead the outlaws away from the scene, his brush with them, and his return to find the maiden gone.

He did not miss anything in his recital, told of the Black Flag of warning, his continuing his trail, and then his meeting in the canyon with Manton Marr, whom he recognized in the moonlight, and who he saw was digging a grave, and was assured had had his brain turned by his misfortunes.

He told of the attempted assassination of the rancher, his firing upon the assassin, his flight, and in fact of all that followed, up to his meeting Miss Redwood at the burned cabin, and later becoming her brother's guest at the hacienda, with the story of his trail to the fort, the killing of Pedro Garcia, and the ambush laid for him upon his return.

The whole story was listened to with intense interest by all.

CHAPTER LI.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

The scout captain and the Revenge Rangers fully understood each other now.

They knew what was before them, and the men had abiding faith in their new leader.

His reputation was too well established for them not to have full confidence in him, and to them it began to look as though the end was at hand.

At last Miss Redwood said that she must return to her home, and a plan was settled upon where a message could reach her, or the band, at any time within twenty-four hours.

"I will ride a short distance with you, miss, as I desire to meet my pard, Buckskin Sam, and have you know him, as well as feel that he knows our fair mascot."

"Then I shall take him to our camp and let him know just who each member of our band is."

"His duty will be, as I said, to shadow our trail, a couple of hours or so behind us, and in this way he will be most useful, though not with us directly."

A mile they had gone together, when Miss Redwood said that her trail would lead her from there off to the right.

Buffalo Bill halted, and as he did so he heard a whistle which he knew was a peculiar note of Buckskin Sam.

It told him that the Verde scout was near and saw them.

At once he signaled for him to come forward, and almost immediately there arose from behind a boulder Buckskin Sam and his horse.

They had been lying down there, having done so when they saw Buffalo Bill and the maiden approaching, Sam not knowing whether he was to show himself or not.

Buffalo Bill at once presented the Verde scout to his fair companion, who greeted him cordially, and then the situation was explained as it was, and what the movements of the future were to be.

Miss Redwood then said good-by, and off she went at a rapid gallop.

The two scouts sat upon their horses watching her until she disappeared from sight, and then had a confidential talk together.

"You like your Revenge Rangers, then, Pard Bill?" asked the Texan.

"Indeed, I do, and one and all of them are to be relied upon, so we will make a record together, mark my words, especially as I have your aid."

"I am with you in all that I can do."

"I know that; but how did you arrange about your prisoner and dead man?"

Buckskin Sam told what he had done, and then Buffalo Bill had his story to make known, of his meeting with the Man in Black, lassoing him, and having him shot by Rupert Redwood.

"Why is it that Miss Redwood keeps her actions secret from her brother, Bill, in this manner?" asked Buckskin Sam.

"I do not exactly know."

"In fact, she has some reason for it which she has not yet made known to me."

"But you may be sure it is a good one."

"Perhaps she knows that he would not sanction her allying herself to these men as she has."

"Doubtless."

"Is there any handsome young fellow in the band who might account for it?"

"No, and the real leader is an old man by the name of Custer."

"Then love is not at the basis of her actions?"

"Not that I have been able to discover."

"Do you know that I had an idea, in spite of the claim of others, that Van Soulsby held the best show with Miss Marr?"

"Rather than Rupert Redwood?"

"Yes, for the latter is a reckless devil, not, I consider, the man that Van Soulsby is."

"And you think Miss Marr was the same way of thinking?"

"I do, for a woman said so, the wife of an officer who visited the Marr Ranch, and it takes a woman, you know, to find out the secrets of one of her own sex."

"It surely does."

"But I hope young Soulsby and his men will not drive the Black Brotherhood to cover, so that we cannot find them."

"No, I think not, for the outlaw spies have already reported that the regulators are upon their trail, and they'll either ambush and annihilate them, leading them into a death-trap, or they will simply scatter and let them look for them in vain."

"So I fear; but that young Soulsby seemed to me a clever fellow, and one who knew what he was about."

"True, and he is as brave as they make them; but he labors under the same disadvantage that scouts and soldiers do in moving against the outlaws, that is, their movements are known and reported by spies, and that lays them open to be led into a trap, or gives the gang a chance to escape."

"Now, you have gone about it right; you have not heralded your coming."

"Hark! listen to those hoof-falls!" cried Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LII.

NO MERCY FOR WOMEN.

The two scouts had not moved from their position, after parting with Miss Redwood.

Buffalo Bill had been anxious to have his comrade fully understand the situation, before he took him to the camp of the Revenge Rangers.

But while Buckskin Sam was talking the keen sense of hearing possessed by Buffalo Bill, heard a sound in the distance he could not mistake.

It was the fall of hoofs, and at a rapid run.

The sound came from some distance off.

It was drawing nearer, hence could not be the hoofs of the horse ridden by Miss Redwood.

But might she not be returning?

If so, something had gone wrong with her, or she had forgotten some idea of importance she wished to convey.

Yet why ride at that breakneck speed, for the clatter of hoofs now showed that the coming horse was on a run.

"Sam."

"Yes, Bill."

"Hark!"

"Do you not notice other hoofs further away?"

"I do, now that you refer to the fact."

"It is Miss Redwood returning, and she is being pursued."

"Doubtless."

"Let us go into hiding yonder where you were."

"Will your horse lie down flat at your bidding?"

"Oh, yes, he'll do anything but talk."

"Then it is the very place to hide."

"Come on."

"We have no time to lose."

They rode rapidly for the rocks that had concealed Buckskin Sam, and at a word, as they dismounted, their horses dropped down.

In an instant horses and riders were concealed, and the two scouts were ready for business.

On came the rapidly flying hoofs, and now distinctly heard, there came others further away, yet pressing on just as rapidly.

"How many, Bill?"

"I should say five or six, from the clatter."

"About that."

"Well, we will give them a surprise, and that will even matters up in our favor."

"Oh, yes."

"And the Revenge Rangers will be on hand soon after they hear the firing."

"No doubt."

Both men were crouching now among the rocks, their rifles leveled and hidden by a pine bush they had broken off and stuck up before them.

Their horses lay flat down behind the rocks, so could not be seen, and the trail led by within thirty feet of them.

With eyes riveted upon the spot several hundred yards away, where those coming must dash into view, the scouts awaited for the ordeal, whatever it might be.

A moment more and there bounded into sight a horse and rider.

"The girl, as I feared."

"Yes."

"And riding for her life."

"It looks so."

On she came, her horse at its greatest speed, and she urging it on the faster, if it were possible.

But suddenly there came a volley of shots, from back out of sight, and the animal sprung into the air, nearly fell, then kept up his running, but at a slower pace.

He could do no more, for he had been hard hit.

"That settles it, Sam, for they deserve no mercy, firing upon a woman as they have."

"So I say, Bill."

The faces of the scouts were stern as death now, white and determined.

They forgot about odds, and were ready to do battle to save that poor girl from inhuman foes.

Another few bounds, then a wild swaying, staggering, and the faithful horse went down, not twenty yards from where the scouts were, and just then the pursuers dashed into sight.

"Friends are near."

"Rush to these rocks for shelter!"

The girl had not fallen with her horse. She had caught nimbly upon her feet, and then had stood like a frightened deer pursued by hunters, ready to bound away.

She heard the deep-toned voice of Buffalo Bill and recognized it.

Gathering her riding skirt about her, she flew toward the rocks.

The scouts were not visible, but the girl was, and her pursuers uttered a yell of triumph.

They had killed her horse, and they felt that she was at their mercy.

The flight to the pile of rocks could not save her, though they knew she was armed and might show fight.

They were all in plain view now, and they were five in number.

Their black clothes and masks told plainly who they were.

Sooner than he had anticipated Buffalo Bill found himself face to face with the Men in Black whom he had set out to trail to their doom.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE OUTLAW'S MISTAKE.

The fugitive girl sunk down by the two horses, and was hidden by the rocks from her pursuers.

As she did so she gasped:

"Thank God, you are here to save me!"

It was all she said, and then she watched and waited.

Neither Buffalo Bill or Buckskin Sam had spoken a word to her.

They were peering through the pine bush upon the coming Men in Black.

The latter were still riding rapidly, and they held their rifles in hand.

They felt sure of their game now.

"Are you afraid that they will kill you?" suddenly asked Buffalo Bill.

"They fired upon me."

"True, but your horse was outfooting theirs, and they were determined you should not escape."

"Yes."

"Dare you advance to meet them, so that they will not see us?"

"I will."

"We will drop the man that attempts to harm you; but we wish to hear what they have to say, if possible."

"I will go."

With this the brave girl arose, and, holding her hands above her head, in token of surrender, she quickly advanced toward the five horsemen, now within a few hundred feet of her.

They were surprised at her act, and half drew rein.

One of them raised his rifle, but was checked by his companions.

"She's dead sure our game now, pards, and our orders was to kill her only when we couldn't catch her," said one.

They now halted in front of the girl, who indignantly demanded:

"Well, what means this outrage upon me, a woman, even from such devils as you of the Black Masks have proven yourselves to be?"

The men seemed utterly amazed at something.

They made no reply, but sat upon their horses gazing at the girl with glaring eyes.

Then they looked toward each other.

But for full a moment they uttered no word.

Miss Redwood stood her ground fearlessly, but seemed surprised at their conduct.

She had lowered her hands, and stood gazing at them with unflinching eyes and mien, her face very pale, her bosom heaving, and her eyes flashing.

"Well, I be durned fer a sinner, ef we hain't fools, fer it hain't ther gal thet escaped after all, but Miss Rena Redwood," at last said one of the five.

"It do be fer sartin," another remarked.

"Well, now that you see that you have made a mistake, what is your intention regarding me?"

"We has ter consider."

"You did not know me as Miss Redwood?"

"You bet we didn't."

"Who did you mistake me for?"

"Thet Marr gal."

"Miss Helen Marr?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had burned her to death with her family."

"Not much, she didn't burn."

"Why did you show mercy to her?"

"Cap'n's orders."

"But it was not mercy to make her a prisoner of such as you; death were preferable."

"Thet's your opinion, miss."

"Where is she now?"

"She gave us ther slip in our camp in some way, and we was huntin' fer her when we met ther cap'n, and he told us ter bring her back dead, if we couldn't catch her alive, but not let her escape under no circumstances."

"And you saw me and supposed I was Miss Marr?"

"It's just what we did, and thet's why we chased you, miss, and fired on you when we seen yer horse was a droppin' us."

"Say, Jack, yer talks too glib, fer you is givin' ther whole thing away ter Miss Redwood, and she'll tell her brother and then ther whole of Arizona will be out lookin' fer Miss Helen Marr, and it will be know'd she be our prisoner, if she hain't escaped us, which I is afeerd she hev."

"Thet's so, I hes been a fool, and no mistake, and so I'll hev ter jist git out of it as best I can," said the man who appeared to be the leader of the gang of five.

They were all securely masked, dressed in black, well mounted, and armed, and no eye could penetrate their disguise.

Miss Redwood stood watching them closely, and there was an expression upon her face which they could not read.

She knew that there were listeners to every word that had been uttered.

What they would do to get out of the scrape their glib-tongued leader had led them into she was curious to know.

She wished to have them say why they had known her to be Miss Redwood, and not Helen Marr, they would not have captured her, so she asked:

"Why did you not wish to capture me, knowing me to be Miss Redwood, as I never heard of your showing mercy before to man or woman?"

"Well, we don't intend ter now, as you knows too much, and we'll jist take you along with us, yes, and git big ransom money fer you, too," was the answer of the man who had betrayed their secret to the girl.

CHAPTER LIV.

DEADLY WORK.

Miss Redwood slightly shrunk back at the words of the leader, about making her a prisoner.

"But instantly she remembered that she had two brave defenders within a few yards of her, and she shrunk no more.

She was anxious to make the outlaws give more information, if possible, that the scouts might find useful.

She dreaded the scene that must follow, not so much on her own account as for her two protectors.

They were two against five, and she felt that the odds were terribly against them.

Still, Buffalo Bill had told her they would protect her, and she had every confidence in him and his pard.

But could two face five successfully?

If they killed two or more of the outlaws, must not one of the two fall, she argued.

She begun to long for the coming up of the Revenge Rangers.

But they were a mile away, nearly, and though they would come quickly enough at the sound of the weapons, they might be too late to save precious lives.

All these thoughts flashed through the mind of the young girl, and in spite of herself she was growing nervous.

Still she said, fearlessly:

"Do you mean to say that you will dare make me a prisoner?"

"Thet's what I does say."

"Don't I, pards?"

All answered in the affirmative.

"You will not take my word that I will not repeat what you have said, and

more, will pay you ransom money at any place and time you will name?"

"I never trusted a woman yet, and I hain't going ter do so now."

"Remember, I am armed, and you will attempt to take me at your peril."

"See here, miss, men's lives is valuable out here, and you just better not play a shooting act on us, fer you will be given your own medicine, ef we has ter swar to ther cap'n we thought you was ther Marr gal."

"I cannot appeal to you, then?"

"Not a little bit, for we knows what we is about."

She had dropped her right hand upon the revolver she wore in her belt, but they saw the act, and quick as lightning had their weapons out.

"Drop that, and quick, too!" cried the leader.

He leveled his revolver as he uttered the words.

But the words were his last, for over the top of the rocks rang out a rifle shot, and the man dropped dead.

Instantly another shot came, and a second one fell in his tracks.

This, too, in a second of time.

"Hands up or take your poison, all of you!"

It was the commanding voice of Buffalo Bill that gave the order.

At the same time Miss Redwood sprung out of the line of fire, and leveling her revolver, shouted:

"Yes, hands up, all of you!"

It was a bold act, but then she was a girl who acted fearlessly.

The scout, as he rose, had said:

"Keep down, Sam."

"Don't let them see you!"

As Buffalo Bill faced the three outlaws, instantly a rattle of revolvers begun, and bullets flew thick and fast.

Buckskin Sam also fired, but he still remained hidden, as told to do.

The leader did not wish to show all of his strength at once.

But the rapid fire had been fatal, indeed.

Just how it happened there was no time to see, but within ten seconds five men lay dead or dying upon the ground, Buffalo Bill was standing upon the rocks, wiping his cheek, which a bullet had grazed, and Buckskin Sam had risen with the remark:

"No need of hiding now, Bill."

"But did you see that girl fire her revolver?"

"Yes, she stood at bay like a lioness, and at close range."

"It would not have been so easy for us, but for her."

Just as Buckskin Sam was about to rise from his crouching attitude a horseman dashed into sight, coming along the trail.

It was a Man in Black.

He had heard the firing, a quick glance had shown him that his comrades were down, and also revealed the tall form of Buffalo Bill standing upon the rocks.

Instantly he had wheeled his horse about, as though on a pivot, and drove spurs deep as he dashed away.

"By Heaven, but I believe that man is the captain of the gang."

"I'll follow him!" cried Buffalo Bill, and a call to his horse brought the animal to his feet.

With a bound Buffalo Bill was in his saddle and off in pursuit of the Man in Black who had so quickly retreated from the scene.

CHAPTER LV.

THE RECOGNITION.

The short, sharp, and fatal fight ended in a complete victory for Buffalo Bill, Buckskin Sam, and the girl who had acted so well her part.

Saving Sam's slight wound on the cheek, the three had escaped without harm, while five outlaws had been slain.

Buffalo Bill had caught a quick glance of the horseman who had been riding hard to the rescue of his comrades; then,

realizing that he was too late, had turned and fled.

The scout at once took the idea that it was the unknown leader of the Black Brotherhood, and so had gone in pursuit.

He was some little time behind the fugitive, and just then time counted a great deal; but he had marked where the man in black had disappeared, so was quickly upon his trail.

The scout rode rapidly, for night was not far away, and if he caught up with the man it must be before dark.

After riding a mile or more he halted. The trail showed where the Black Rider had come to a stand, and from that spot there was no trace of track continuing on.

"Up to their old tricks again of hiding the trail, and I must say they do it well. But I must learn their secret, for it is a good one."

The scout dismounted and began to examine the ground closely, and at last was able to discover the trick played.

"He simply muffles the hoofs of his horse, for here the mufflers have passed; but it will be impossible to trace them on this ground fast enough to overtake him before night."

"I'll have to give him up, but he'll have news for his band, and, as I was the only one he saw, he'll think I rescued the girl and did the shooting. That will make them anxious to find me, which is just what I want."

"Now, to return, to send Miss Redwood home before night, and then to get the Revenge Rangers to work."

And remounting he rode at a gallop back to the ridge.

Meanwhile the Revenge Rangers had come with a rush to the scene of combat to find not Buffalo Bill, but their mascot standing there with the scout in green, whom all of them knew by sight, and respected and admired greatly.

Miss Redwood related what had happened, and told where the scout had gone. At once several of the Rangers were going after him, but Buckskin Sam suggested that it would be best for the horsemen to keep hidden, as his army pard was fully able to take care of himself, and he pointed significantly at the five dead outlaws.

Sam then told how bravely Miss Redwood had behaved, and said that he had seen one of the outlaws level his revolver upon her, and he tried to fire quick enough to save her, but was surprised to see the man drop, and it was the Rangers' mascot who had fired the shot that saved her.

Catching the horses of the outlaws, the Rangers then unmasked the dead, and exclamations of surprise showed that they had made a discovery.

"Why, here is one of Rancher Martin Marr's own cowboys!" cried Custer.

"It is, indeed, and one of his most trusted men, as I happen to know," was the reply of another.

"This man was one of the Redwood Hacienda cowboys—you recognize him, miss?"

"Yes, he was from the Hacienda. Do you recognize any of the others?"

"Yes, every one of them; they all come from the ranches. Now we understand how they always scattered so soon after their lawless deeds and seemed to become invisible, while they knew just who to attack, and when," said Custer.

"I wonder, after this, if the band of the Black Brotherhood will still boast of having their fatal thirteen members," remarked a young Ranger.

CHAPTER LVI.

SHADOWED.

Just as the remark was made, as to whether the Black Brotherhood, after the losses they had met with, would still claim to be a fatal thirteen, one of the Rangers called out:

"There he comes!"

All eyes turned in the direction indi-

cated, and they beheld Buffalo Bill riding rapidly toward them.

He soon drew rein in their midst, raised his sombrero, and said, pleasantly:

"You were promptly on hand, Rangers, I see."

"But my game escaped me, I am sorry to say."

"He covered up his tracks so well that I could not follow him, and, as we have some captured horses of the band, will you look and see if you can find on them any mufflers with which they hide the hoof tracks with?"

Several men at once began the search, and on four of the five horses wrapped up in the blanket roll, were found a set of leather boots, a muffler which could be drawn on over the hoof of a horse and laced up.

The bottom of these were well padded, large and round, and only in the softest ground would they have made any imprint.

Thus had the scout discovered the secret of how the outlaws had so well and cleverly covered up their trails.

"Sam, as you are to shadow me, take one of these sets, and I will take another, leaving two pairs for the Rangers to use, though we will soon steal the outlaw's thunder and have mufflers for all of our horses," said Buffalo Bill.

The five bodies were then packed upon their own horses, to be taken to the camp for burial, and as Miss Redwood was anxious to get off at once upon another attempt to return to her home, Buffalo Bill offered to accompany her.

But this she firmly refused to allow him to do, saying that she did not feel in the least timid, and her horse could outfoot any animal that might be put in chase of her.

With a cheery good-by to all, she started on her ride, Buffalo Bill saying to her:

"Do not be surprised to see me at your home at any time, for I am anxious to see your brother about what you cannot tell him."

She looked a little anxious at this, but made no reply and rode away.

"Men, you can go to camp, and I'll be there to-morrow morning, for I do not intend to allow Miss Redwood to go alone, for I shall follow, to be near if aid is needed."

The men were all glad to hear this, and after a few instructions, and telling Buckskin Sam that he had better remain in the camp of the Revenge Rangers until his return, the scout rode off on his mission to shadow Miss Redwood home.

The trail of her horse was readily followed for several miles, and then entered a canyon, where the trail was so hard no iron-shod hoof would leave a track.

But Buffalo Bill felt that she could go no other way, so kept steadily on.

He had seen by the tracks of her horse that she had ridden rapidly, but he, too, had kept up a brisk pace, and was a little surprised that he had not come in sight of her.

The canyon was a long one, wild, rugged, winding, and here and there overhung with mountainous cliffs.

There was heavy timber upon the slopes and cliffs, and the way was dark there before the sun had gone down below the horizon.

As Buffalo Bill reached the end of the canyon night had come on, so all was darkness about him.

But he had begun to understand the lay of the land well, knew just about the direction where the Hacienda Ranch should lie, and saw dimly after leaving the canyon that there was a trail which his horse seemed to wish to follow.

"She has gone this way, has she, old fellow?"

"Well, you push along the same trail," said the scout to his horse, and he went on at a canter.

After a ride of miles he came out into the prairie country under the range that

he knew stood at the base of the Hacienda Ranch, and far away in the distance a light was visible.

"It is the Hacienda, and I will go there, for I do wish to let Rupert Redwood know about the men on his ranch whom we have discovered to be outlaws."

"For reasons, I will say nothing of any one having been with me, but I'll have a talk with him, and see if he cannot give me a few good pointers."

"Miss Redwood will be surprised at my coming so soon, but then she will know that anxiety for her safety prompted me to do so."

With this the scout kept up a steady gait, and at last rode up to the Hacienda gate.

It was opened when he announced his name by an attendant, who told him his master had just lately come home, and was waiting for supper to be served to him.

A moment after he was ushered into the pleasant dining room and was face to face with Rupert Redwood and his sister.

The former rose with evident surprise at seeing him, and his appearance indicated hard riding and fatigue.

Rena Redwood rose quickly, and with a cordial manner extended her hand.

She was neatly attired and there was not a trace of fatigue about her, though the scout knew well what she had just gone through with.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE SCOUT'S VISIT.

The manner of Rena Redwood was in strange contrast to that of her brother, as Buffalo Bill could not fail to notice.

His greeting of the scout was cordial enough, but yet he seemed to show that it was a surprise.

Knowing that the rancher had also had a hard day of it, Buffalo Bill could appreciate his fatigue, yet he could not have gone through as much as had his sister, and she came up bright and smiling.

"I am glad you are in time for supper, Mr. Cody, and let me tell you that I have just returned, for I have been on a long trail since we met this morning," said Rupert Redwood.

"I may say that I have also, sir, for after seeing you I had come to halt on my trail, and I decided to come by and see you to-night, if only for an hour."

"No, no, you must remain all night, and longer if you can."

"Get a good rest, as you have a long trail ahead of you to the Northwest."

"Yes, but both my horse and myself are used to hardships."

"How I envy men who can go when and where they please, while I, a woman, must be content with a daily gallop of a few miles and then have to be bored with an attendant."

"I rather like it because women are so dependent, Miss Renwood; it makes us appreciate them the more for being so totally the opposite of men."

"Why, I cannot look with patience upon a woman aping man's ways any more than I can upon a male creature, a dude, who tries to appear effeminate."

"Such women have all the mannishness of men without their manliness, just as dudes are effeminate without being womanly."

Rena Redwood looked at the scout with positive admiration and said:

"Mr. Cody, you have well said, and deliver me from a mannish woman, as you aptly call them; but I meant that women missed so much of life because they cannot do certain things that fear of danger or talk prevent them from doing."

"Now, I admire a brave woman, and many are such."

"Yes, indeed, I'll vouch for that," was the scout's hearty response, and he looked at Rena Redwood in a very significant way.

Supper was then announced, and the three sat down to it, and Buffalo Bill ate heartily, though neither the rancher nor his sister seemed to have gained an appetite from their day in the saddle.

After supper, as Rena Redwood saw that the scout wished to have a talk with her brother, she bade him good night and good-by, for he was positive in his declining to remain, saying that he must continue on in an hour or two, and would camp miles away upon his trail.

When the young lady had retired, Buffalo Bill said:

"After our adventure this morning, Mr. Redwood, I did not expect to see you so soon again."

"I am glad that circumstances caused such to be the case, however, Mr. Cody."

"Thank you, sir."

"But my reasons for coming is to tell you that I met with another adventure that I think you should know."

"Yes, yes, certainly."

"It has been my good fortune to aid in reducing the Black Brotherhood band by five more of its men to-day."

"Great Scott!"

"Can this be possible?"

"It is, sir."

For a moment there was a silence, and then Rupert Redwood asked:

"Tell me how you were so fortunate."

"Well, sir, it is a short story, for a scout came after me from Fort Verde, overtaking me upon the trail, and we were run upon by five masked men in black, and our position gave us the advantage, so, save this scratch you see on my cheek, we received no harm, while they were utterly wiped out."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Cody."

"Ah, no, it was only a case of outlaws who had the odds against men in the right and who held the position on them; but that is of little matter, the main point being that I desire to acquaint you with the fact that two of those five men were from your ranch."

"Great God!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I do, sir, for my comrade recognized them."

"I'd he know for sure?"

"He said there was no mistake about them."

"And the man you lassoed and I killed this morning was another of my cowboys?"

"Yes, sir, he was Pedro Garcia, you remember, so that makes five false men in one band on a ranch."

"It is too true," and the rancher appeared deeply moved.

"Have you many men on your ranch, sir, may I ask?"

"Fifteen cattle men, or I had that number, and I now dread to trust any of them."

"Why, Mr. Cody, these very men I intended to lead on a hunt after the Black Brotherhood, for, above all things, I would like to get ahead of Van Soulsby and his Regulators," said the rancher earnestly.

CHAPTER LVIII.

SEEN BY THE MOONLIGHT.

The distress of the young rancher of the Hacienda at the falsity of his men touched Buffalo Bill, and he said:

"I am sorry, Mr. Redwood, that the facts are as stated; but it gives you fair warning that to go upon the trail of the Black Brotherhood with men you are in fear of would be useless."

"Very true."

"Your own life might be endangered, and you might find that you had hardly a true man among them, while the bad ones may all have been weeded out and the remainder be all right."

"That's so."

"Yet it will never do for you to take the chances and trust them."

"No."

"As these men have shown that they are members of your band of cowboys, it may be that each ranch can furnish its quota of outlaws in the disguise of honest men, and the whole lawless band be made up of men from the neighboring country engaged in one occupation or another."

"I had not thought of that."

"Yet, it may be true."

"Ah, yes; but if I do not go upon this trail to avenge the Marr family it will be a terrible blow to me, while Van Soulsby is doing all in his power to hunt those fiends down."

"He may and he may not be successful."

"I fear he may."

"He has started upon this trail, it is true; but after discovering what I have, I would not be surprised that there is a spy of the outlaws, perhaps several, right in his band of Regulators."

"By Jove, you may be right, and if so he will be led off their trail and then give us a chance."

"That is a selfish remark, Mr. Redwood, I am frank enough to say to you, for there can be no rivalry now between you, and if Mr. Soulsby can hunt down the band of outlaws, all should be glad, for you, with traitors under your own roof, can hardly expect to be successful."

"You are right and I was wrong in making the remark, Mr. Cody."

"I really do not see that I can do anything."

"Until you get men about you that you are sure of."

"But I have told you what I came by here to do, so must go on my way."

"I am sorry I cannot persuade you to remain."

"Thank you, no, I must be going."

"You know best."

"But do you think there could be no mistake about those men?"

"How?"

"Whether they were really of the Black Brotherhood or not?"

"Oh, no, for they wore the garb."

"Were men in black and masked?"

"Yes."

"Did you find nothing upon them to convict others?"

"Some money and weapons, that was all."

"My pard cared for that."

"And, of course, as a scout from Verde, carried all back to the fort."

"He had the bodies strapped upon the horses to start as I left," said Buffalo Bill, quietly, and then added:

"I must go now."

"Allow me to have some food put up for you—I will return in a few minutes."

Buffalo Bill tried to check him, but he had reached the door.

Just then he met his sister, who said:

"I have returned to say, Mr. Cody, that I have had a bag of provisions put up for you."

"You are very kind, indeed, Miss Redwood, and I accept and appreciate your goodness to me."

"But now good-by again," and Buffalo Bill was escorted to the plaza of the Hacienda, where his horse that had been well cared for was led up by a servant.

With a grasp of the rancher's hand, he mounted and rode out of the adobe walls upon the plain, turning to the left, as the rancher had directed him to do.

But only a short distance did he go in this direction, when he halted, took the hoof muffers he had taken from one of the dead outlaws' traps out of his saddle roll and fastened them upon his own horse.

Then he turned off the well-beaten trail upon the plain and cut across to gain the same way by which he had approached the Hacienda.

He had not gone very far before he muttered:

"I certainly heard the snort of a horse, and know that I am being followed."

"Well, we'll see what comes of it."

With this he rode on slowly, keeping his face to the rear to try and detect any shadowy form upon his trail.

He had arrived somewhat late at the Hacienda, and, remaining for some time, it was after midnight before he left; so that the moon as it arose was brightening the horizon and threatened soon to appear.

Buffalo Bill was glad to see that it would rise directly behind him and muttered:

"Just my luck, for it will reveal whether I am right in the belief that any one is following me."

Soon after the moon appeared, just as the scout was going over a rise down into a valley beyond, which led him into the canyon before referred to.

With just his head peering over the rise he looked behind him and his eyes fell upon a horseman following him.

CHAPTER LIX.

BUFFALO BILL'S LUCK.

Buffalo Bill continued on his way, after the discovery he had made by the light of the moon and turned neither to the right or left.

He seemed not to dread the discovery of a man on his track in the slightest degree.

After going a short distance he began to whistle, and several times yawned aloud.

But he was not the indifferent man that he appeared, for his ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, and time and again he looked back to see if he could catch a glimpse of his shadower.

He several times did so, and saw that the horseman had dropped further behind.

The scout knew that this was to avoid being seen by him, should he glance behind him.

He was not riding very fast, for his horse did not seem to like the mufflers he wore, and had shown his disapprobation of them several times.

"Never mind, we'll take them off at the canyon," the scout had said encouragingly.

Soon the canyon was reached, and, dismounting at a spot that seemed to catch his eye, Buffalo Bill led his horse quickly behind a large boulder, drew off the mufflers from his hoofs, and then remounting began to whirl his lariat about his head.

His follower was coming slowly along behind him, some four hundred yards distant, and little suspected that there was danger ahead for him.

Neither did Buffalo Bill suspect that a third horseman was following the second one.

The third horseman was robed in black and was masked.

Whoever the one shadowing Buffalo Bill might be, the third man wore the garb of the Black Brotherhood.

If the one on Buffalo Bill's track knew that he had a follower also, he did not appear to do so.

No more did he suspect that the scout had halted amid the shadows of the canyon.

On his way he went, not anxious to get too near, but expecting to come within view of Buffalo Bill when he got out of the dark canyon.

The spot chosen by Buffalo Bill for an ambush was an excellent one, for it brought his follower into the full glare of the moonlight just as he came up, but allowed him to be mounted and unseen among the shadows.

The first that the shadower knew or suspected that the biter might be bitten was when a lariat rattled over his shoulders and by a spring forward of his horse he was dragged from his saddle.

Buffalo Bill stood over him by the time he realized that he had been trapped in his own game, and said quietly:

"If you value life you will make no resistance."

"Caramba, senior! But who are you?"

cried the man in broken English, and his looks revealed that he was a half-breed Mexican and Indian.

"I am a Government scout and wish to know why you are following me?"

"No, no, señor; I was not following you."

"Where were you going?"

"To look for stray cattle, Señor."

"At night?"

"I wanted to be on the plains when day broke, señor."

"Where do you live?"

"At the Hacienda Ranch; the Señor Redwood is my boss, señor, a very good man."

"Yes, but his cattle men do not appear to take him for an example."

"Me good man, señor."

"Then you belie your looks."

"Come, you must go with me."

"Oh, señor!"

"No nonsense, for I'll stand none—see!"

The fellow's belt of arms was taken from him, and for a moment, being a stout fellow, he appeared about to resist, but a wrench of his arm and a grasp on his throat showed that he was utterly powerless in the scout's hands.

His hands were quickly secured behind his back, his feet tied, and then the scout went to catch his prisoner's horse.

This done he led the animal back to where his bound rider was, and was examining his equipment when he suddenly uttered a very vehement expression, followed by the words:

"Ah! You are one of the Black Brotherhood, are you?"

"Oh, no, señor, no!"

"Well, here is your disguise, lying across your saddle ready to slip on when needed."

"No, señor, no. I found it on the trail."

"A costly find for you, my man, and let me tell you that the Black Brotherhood will find it hard to keep up their Fatal Thirteen at the rate that I happen to know they are dropping off."

"But, come, mount your horse, for I have freed your legs."

"But, señor—"

"Obey, or I'll strap a dead man across that saddle."

The man fairly leaped upon his horse at this, his act causing Buffalo Bill to remark:

"I think you are just the timber I want."

CHAPTER LX.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

The man who had been shadowing the shadower of Buffalo Bill halted suddenly after he had entered the cabin.

He heard a sound ahead he did not like.

It was the sound of voices.

Why that should be seemed to trouble him.

As has been said, he wore the garb of the Black Brotherhood.

He wheeled his horse in among the shadows of the canyon, hitched him quickly to a stunted pine, and went forward on foot.

He did not go very far, but it was far enough for his purpose.

He discovered the cause of his hearing those voices.

His words showed this, for he muttered:

"Curses! that man has roped him."

"There will be no safety for any one until Buffalo Bill is in his grave."

"It is an act that will create a stir, yet must be done."

"I'll think about it."

"Now to follow them, for though the best trailer in the outfit, that half-breed is not to be trusted when tempted."

With this he returned to his horse, as soon as assured that Buffalo Bill had ridden on with his prisoner, and mounting, followed on their trail.

Buffalo Bill rode on his way with his prisoner close by his side.

The man chatted away in his broken English, intermixed with Mexican patois and Indian, and vowed by everything good that he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

"Only a poor cattle herder, señor."

Buffalo Bill let him talk on, making a mental note of some things that he said, and asking only an occasional question.

One of them was to the point:

"Which would you rather do, live or be hanged?"

The man shuddered, but soon became very curious to know just what the scout meant by his terrible words.

"I mean simply that I have an idea that a horse, good outfit, a bag of gold, say several hundred dollars, with a chance to make tracks for Mexico, to be seen no more in this country, would be more pleasing to you than to have a rope put around your neck and you hoisted upon the limb of a tree."

"Oh, señor!"

"Now quit talking and go to thinking."

"Yes, señor."

"Just turn it over in your mind whether it is not best to take my offer, answer all questions I ask you, and then light out, or refuse and be hanged by sunrise, for I am taking you to a camp where the men will hang you at sight, unless I can vouch for you."

"Señor, oh, señor, I will—"

"Think, don't talk."

"Turn it over in your mind, as we ride along, and when you have concluded what you will do just say what that conclusion is."

"I will think, good señor."

For some distance they rode on in silence, the prisoner silent, but doubtless very thoughtful.

They had reached the end of the canyon, and were going over the ridge upon the plateau.

The moonlight fell brightly upon both, and either could have been distinguished at a distance of a hundred yards.

It had been rough traveling for the horses on approaching the end of the canyon, so that they had gone in a slow walk.

A man on foot could travel much faster than they just there.

And a man on foot did.

He seemed to know the canyon perfectly, and he left his horse and ran on until he came closer and closer to the scout and his prisoner.

His feet gave no sound, and in the shadow he got up to within easy range.

The scout had mounted out of the shadows, and side-by-side with his prisoner was near the top of the ridge.

Once there, and the two horsemen would be relieved in full outline against the sky.

As they reached the ridge the prisoner turned toward Buffalo Bill and said:

"Señor, me think heap."

"Well?"

"Me talk and live, not keep silent and hang."

"Me no fool, señor."

"So I had observed."

"Yes, me talk all you want and live."

The last word had hardly left his lips when a red glare illumined the silver light of the moon.

At the same instant the loud report of a rifle echoed among the rocks.

Buffalo Bill saw his prisoner lunge forward upon the horn of his saddle, from which he would have fallen but that he was bound to it.

The two horses both sprung forward in affright, but they were quickly checked by the scout, who dismounted, and, leaping to the ridge, peered over, rifle in hand.

"Oh, señor, he killed me!" cried the half-breed.

"Who?"

"Him."

"Who?"

"The chief."

"He—I tell you—"

But the words ceased, for the man was dead, and was hanging in his saddle, held by the lariat that bound him.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE RETURN OF THE CHIEF.

The shot from the rear had been wholly unexpected by Buffalo Bill.

At first he regarded it as his luck to escape while his prisoner was killed.

But he thought differently later on.

Going back to the ridge, he waited, rifle in hand.

He peered down into the canyon, but could see nothing.

But he detected the sound of running feet.

The one who fired the shot was escaping.

Anxious to at least try and strike back, Buffalo Bill leveled his repeating rifle in the direction of the sound, and at once the lively music of the matchless weapon begun.

It was all at random, in the dark, yet he felt that a stray shot might strike the fugitive assassin.

This done, he reloaded the weapon and went on foot back through the canyon as far as he deemed necessary.

But he came upon no dead or dying man, heard no sound, so returned to his horses and his dead outlaw.

He saw that the body was secure upon the saddle, and, finding mufflers in the outlaw's traps, he put them upon the horse and once more his own animal had to submit to them.

He did not care to be tracked to the camp of the Revenge Rangers.

Continuing on his way, where the nature of the ground allowed the scout pushed rapidly on, and at last turned off the trail toward the camp.

Hardly had he done so when, in the darkness, came the stern command:

"Halt and hands up!"

"We have you covered!"

"Ho, Sam, on watch, I see."

"Ah, it is you, is it, Pard Bill?"

"Ay, ay."

"The second horse fooled me, and then it is so dark here."

"Yes."

"How goes the camp?"

"All right."

"I made the men turn in, while I stood watch."

"Just your style, Sam."

"You are a perfect owl."

"I can sleep when I get the chance, too, pard."

"But, you have a prisoner there?"

"Well, he was, but he's free now."

"Then you found a Man in Black who was willing to sell out?"

"Yes, but let me tell you that he followed me from the Redwood Ranch, but I got onto his curves, so roped him in."

"We got along all right, for we had agreed to terms, but he was not alone, or he did not know that he was shadowed."

"I see."

"Why, the man is dead," and Sam had now stepped up to the horse bearing the body.

"Yes, he was shot from behind."

"Well, well."

"Those Men in Black do not allow one of their band to remain a prisoner, fearing they may be tempted to turn traitor."

"So kill them when they are caught?"

"Exactly."

Buffalo Bill explained how the shot had been fired, and continued:

"Both horses are muffled, so I cannot be tracked here, and you can come on to camp and turn in, Sam, as you'll get several hours' sleep, and there is no danger."

"But may you not have been shadowed?"

"No, the hint that I gave with my rifle, that I would keep my eye behind me, was enough, and I halted on my way now and then, hoping some one would come upon me."

"Come, we'll turn in, and at breakfast I'll tell all of you my night's ride."

The body of the outlaw was taken from the horse and placed on the ground, hands folded on the breast, and a blanket

spread over it, and the two pardes were not long in seeking rest.

Several of the rangers awoke, and were glad to know of their chief's return, and told him they would not call him until breakfast was ready.

A couple of hours after, they arose, built a fire, and when they had a good breakfast ready, Buffalo Bill and Buckskin Sam were called, and, making a hasty toilet at the brook, they joined their comrades.

Then Buffalo Bill told his story, and said at its conclusion:

"Did you bury the dead you brought into camp?"

"Not until you return, sir, but the grave is dug and there is ample spare room for this other body.

"We congratulate you upon your escape, sir," said Custer.

"I was not wanted near so much as the captured outlaw.

"He was simply silenced by being killed."

"I guess that is the way it was," Buckskin Sam remarked, adding:

"They would not kill you, Bill, if they had the chance, for well they know that every scout and soldier in Verde would be turned loose to sweep this country of every suspicious character.

"No, they are afraid to kill you; but all the same, don't expose yourself, for some fool may be tempted."

"I have always trusted to my luck, for it seems I was born under a lucky star.

"But now, comrades, my plan is to send scouts out singly, and for three purposes."

All were at once deeply attentive, to hear more from their leader.

CHAPTER LXII.

UNDER SPECIAL ORDERS.

Continuing, Buffalo Bill went on to say, every Revenge Ranger listening with the deepest attention:

"There is no doubt in my mind that the cattlemen on the Redwood Ranch are the most deeply concerned in this lawless work.

"Mr. Redwood is known to be rich, and he employs more men than any one else in this part of the country.

"The hacienda is as strong as a fort, and situated right at the base of the mountains, so that it could be readily defended, and an easy retreat made if the outlaws had to give way.

"And in their retreat they would be very careful to carry with them Mr. Redwood and his beautiful sister, to hold for ransom, while all the booty in the hacienda would be taken also, along with the splendid lot of horses that are known to be upon the ranch.

"The hacienda is centrally located, and all things considered, I have decided that the centre of operations, the head and front of this lawless band, is there or near by.

"See how I was attacked there by Pedro Garcia, and again see how quickly I was followed from there last night.

"Then, too, the fact that Miss Redwood is so interested, to me, is proof that she knows, or suspects, that her home is the headquarters of the outlaws, and for some reason, we know not what, she keeps the secret hidden from her brother.

"For this reason I wish to have the Redwood Hacienda shadowed, and two of you men, who best know the surroundings, must do the work."

"I have this to suggest, sir, and they know every foot of the ground," said Custer.

"That is settled, then.

"Now to the fact that Mr. Manton Marr is not dead.

"He must be found, and three men must start on this duty.

"As you saw him where I did, it proves that he is haunting the vicinity of his ruined home, and there he must be sought.

"Mr. Custer, you know the men to suggest for this work."

"I do, sir."

"Now, it is very sure, from what we know of the chase of Miss Redwood yesterday, that she has escaped from the outlaws.

"When I saw her, wounded as she was, I knew she feared she was going to die.

"I did not think so, and great fatigue, fear, and excitement caused her to believe death was at hand.

"She was wounded, as far as I could discover, in the neck or shoulder; but the wound might have been only a slight one, magnified by a girl's fear into a mortal one.

"If she did escape, and was not recaptured, we must find her.

"If she is wandering about or in hiding, we must find her, while if she was recaptured, she must be retaken, so I wish three men for this special duty."

"I will name them, sir."

"Good!

"Now, that takes eight from our band, and Buckskin Sam and I will go off on special scouts, leaving four men here in camp.

"I wish one man to be constantly ready to go off after one of the parties of these I have named for special duty, and I desire that one man be sent here every twenty-four hours to report.

"Mr. Custer, you will remain here with the three other men and be in charge."

"Yes, sir."

"You will keep one man constantly on watch out on the trail, and be ready to move camp within five minutes' notice."

"I will, sir."

"Now, men, you all know the duties you are to perform, and as there are no traitors in our band, we will win success," and the penetrating eyes of Buffalo Bill swept around the group and rested upon each face.

There was not a flinching eye, and each gaze met his own fearlessly.

The Revenge Rangers were true as steel.

"There is one thing more, men.

"Should any one, save our own band, and of course that means our fair mascot, come to this camp, or visit the place where any of the three scouting parties may be, no matter who he may be, hold him a prisoner for me to see."

Why he wished this Buffalo Bill did not explain, but the men felt that he had some good reason for it, and would obey, though it was a strange command they thought, as they might meet with a Fort Verde scout, a soldier courier, one of Van Soulsby's Regulators, or a well-known rancher.

Having put the Revenge Rangers under special orders, buried the dead outlaw, and gotten all ready for the move of the separate parties, Buffalo Bill started them upon their varied trails.

Then he had a talk with Custer, and, mounting his horse, rode out of camp with Buckskin Sam.

"You have not told me, Pard Bill, just what I am to do," said Buckskin Sam.

"Shadow me."

"Ah! I see, and a good idea."

"It may turn out so.

"Drop back now, and keep well out of sight behind me, ready to answer any call or signal, and I will be on hand should you need me," and the Verde scout dropped back, while Buffalo Bill rode on ahead alone.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE FAIR FUGITIVE.

The first thought of Buffalo Bill was to find Helen Marr, be she a captive, a wanderer, or dead.

He knew that the five men who had been pursuing Miss Redwood the day before were in search of Helen Marr,

who had escaped from the outlaws' clutches in some way.

If so, then she must have been somewhere near the scene of the fatal combat in defense of Miss Redwood.

The latter's horse must have been like the one Helen Marr had escaped upon, and their riding habits were similar, while both had worn slouch hats, with plumes, so had looked enough alike to cause the mistake of the outlaws.

The five men had been detailed for the search, and the one who had appeared later, to fly and be pursued, Buffalo Bill believed was the chief.

His desire, then, was to pick up the trail of the five outlaws, and follow it, for they must have been tracking the escaped girl until they came upon Miss Redwood.

With this very reasonable belief as to how matters had been, Buffalo Bill took up the trail of the five horses, whose riders then lay in their grave, and followed it for half a dozen miles.

It led back toward the Redwood Hacienda, until nearing the canyon where the half-breed had been killed the night before, and then branched right off into the mountains.

Buffalo Bill followed the trail, making his own, so that Buckskin Sam should make no mistake.

He got down, where the soil was soft, and closely examined the tracks.

Just then he noted the tracks of six horses instead of five.

At once he turned back, going on foot now, and had nearly reached the place where they turned into the main trail, when he detected that one track turned short off to the right.

It was the track of the sixth horse.

He felt sure, as the other trail could be seen from there, that the outlaws, following the fugitive's track, up to that point, had suddenly discovered Miss Redwood and dashed away in pursuit of her, believing her to be their game.

All "signs," as he read them, pointed to this having been the case.

Dropping sticks in the trail, to mark his way to Buckskin Sam, Buffalo Bill turned off on the track of the sixth horse.

This led him for a mile or more almost parallel with the trail leading through the canyon, and then went off into the foothills.

The horse seemed to be wandering at his will, unguided by his rider, if he had one.

But the scout followed the winding trail for miles, and then halted suddenly.

What he saw was a picture.

In a pretty little glen in the hills, on the bank of a stream, was a horse staked out.

A saddle, a lady's, and a bridle were by the stake rope, and under a tree was a small fire, while by it, upon a blanket, lay a form.

It was that of a young girl in blue riding habit.

A slouch hat was near her, with a plume in it, and a bag of provisions, a small coffee pot, and a canteen lay close at hand.

She was fast asleep. She doubtless had gone into camp there the night before, and tired out, had remained there.

As he drew nearer Buffalo Bill saw a rifle lying near her, and a belt of revolvers was within reach of her hand.

For some time the scout gazed upon her.

Was she asleep, or dead?

Fearful of the latter, he called out in a tone not to startle her:

"Miss Marr!"

Several times he called, not daring to approach and awaken her suddenly, if she was only asleep.

At last, to his great joy, she moved, then suddenly sat up.

There, a hundred feet from her, seated upon his horse, she beheld the scout.

A cry burst from her lips, but quick as a flash she seized her rifle.

"Hold!"

"I am no foe, but your friend.

"Do you not recognize me, Miss Helen Marr?"

"I don't know."

"I have no friend on earth now," she said, in a pitiful voice.

"I am Buffalo Bill, whom you saw the other day when you were wounded."

"Do you remember me now, for I left you to keep the outlaws off, and when I returned you had gone."

"Yes, I know you now."

"At last, I meet a friend," and she burst into tears.

The scout allowed her to weep, for he knew it would relieve her pent-up feelings.

But soon he said:

"I have been on the search for you, and other friends are near to save you, while still more are looking for your father."

"He is dead."

"No, he did not perish, for I have seen him; but, like you, he is a wanderer and we will find him."

"Come, let me get some dinner for you, and we will talk it all over, and we'll get enough for three, for I have a friend coming, Buckskin Sam of Fort Verde."

"Yes, I know him, and am so glad, for I am safe now."

CHAPTER LXIV.

HELEN MARR.

The change from despair to hope, the knowledge that she was safe, that her father was not dead, made Helen Marr almost cheerful.

She rallied quickly, and insisted upon getting dinner herself, while Buffalo Bill went out to look up Buckskin Sam and stake the horses out.

They were all soon in camp, and eating heartily, while the girl plaintively told her story.

"She had been found where Buffalo Bill had left her, and the outlaws had at once carried her on with them, several being sent by the chief to take her to the retreat."

She found that she did not suffer from her wound, and when late at night she arrived at a camp in the mountains, she was given into the care of a beautiful Indian girl, and had a chance to examine how severely she had been hurt, she found that the bullet had glanced upon her breast bone, and had cut its way out through the fleshy part of the shoulder.

The bullet had been fired from one side, she said, and by a pursuer who saw that she was escaping, in fact by the leader of the outlaws.

She had not been at home when the house was set on fire by the outlaws, having been visiting at a distant ranch, but got lost on her return, night had come on, and she found her way by the light of the burning cabin.

Coming near, she realized that all were dead that she held dear, and determined to live for revenge, she had wheeled her horse to fly, when she had been pursued, and later fired upon.

When taken to the cabin in the mountains, the Mexican girl referred to had dressed her wound most skillfully, heard her story, and then had said that she would aid her to escape, to avenge herself upon the chief, who was her sworn lover.

This she had done the day before, when the outlaws in camp had been taking their afternoon nap, and she had fitted her out with food and all she would need in her flight.

Afraid to turn into the regular trail when she came in sight of it, she had stuck to the hills, and at last had camped, while, utterly prostrated, she had slept on far into the day.

Such was Helen Marr's simply told story of her sorrows, sufferings, and hardships, all of which the scouts told her were at an end now.

"You will return to camp with us, and our first duty will be to find your father, and then we will strike a blow at that

retreat in the mountains where you were, and be assured that the Black Brotherhood will cease to exist before many days."

"And their chief?" asked Helen Marr.

"He will be taken, too."

"He must be; but I alone know who he is, and my home and all were doomed from the moment I discovered the secret."

"You will tell us who he is."

"Not now."

"Take your own time for that, Miss Marr," was Buffalo Bill's rejoinder.

Dinner over, the three mounted their horses and when a couple of hours after the trio rode into the camp of the Revenge Rangers, Custer and his pard were astounded and delighted.

"What you set out to do, Chief Cody, you accomplish, and no mistake," said Custer.

"Any reports from the three parties out?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Well, as I know the spot where Mr. Marr was seen, I will go there to-night, and Buckskin Sam will accompany me."

"That means success, Mr. Cody."

"I hope so; but not a word to the young lady that her father has been maddened by his sorrows."

"No, indeed, sir."

It was just after supper and near sunset that Buffalo Bill and Buckskin Sam set out together on the search for the Mad Rancher, while Helen followed them to the edge of the camp and called out:

"Something tells me that I am not to lose all, that you will find my poor father, and I can cheer his later years, if mother has been taken from us."

"We will do all in our power, Miss Helen," was Buffalo Bill's reply, and the two scouts rode off in the gathering twilight.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE MAD RANCHER.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

The challenge rang out stern and threatening, and the two horsemen at whom it was directed halted, while one answered:

"The chief!"

At once, came reply:

"Scout or ranger?"

"Both."

"Advance!"

The horsemen rode forward, and a voice said:

"I thought I knew your voice, chief, but I wanted the signals agreed upon."

"You are wise, and on the alert. Where are the other two men?"

"Up the canyon, after Rancher Marr, whom they saw digging a grave, as he is said to do almost constantly."

"I was with them, but remained here to start for camp if they brought any news, and I think they will, for they were close after him."

"I will go on up the canyon—ah! there they come now," and as Buffalo Bill spoke, the other two Revenge Rangers came in sight.

They seemed pleased at sight of their leader and Buckskin Sam, and reported that they had followed Manton Marr up the canyon a mile or more, and then lost him.

"I will return with one of you on foot; and, Sam, you can follow, leading my horse. The moon will rise within half an hour, and it will give us a good light."

Soon after Buffalo Bill started out on foot with one of the rangers, while the other two were told to guard the pass.

Buckskin Sam followed mounted, and leading the chief's horse.

The moon came up when they had gone about a mile, and the canyon was quite plainly lighted up.

Suddenly the chief halted.

"See there!" and he pointed to where a man was seen, digging a grave.

"I will catch him with my lasso, for it is about the only way to secure him."

"Go back and halt Sam. I can get near the poor fellow by keeping in the shadows on that side of the cliff."

The scout had brought his lasso with him, and, keeping in the shadows, he crept nearer and nearer to the man, who stood in the moonlight, digging away with his pick.

Creeping closer and still closer, Buffalo Bill managed to gain a position not forty feet from the Mad Rancher, who seemed only intent upon his work.

The lasso was coiled and ready, and Buffalo Bill noticed, as before, that the rancher halted at times in his work to gaze at the moon, and mutter to himself.

"If I could only speak to him without his running off I would be glad, for I hate to lasso him like a wild animal," and the scout hesitated.

But he felt that the man must not be allowed to bound away in flight again; so the lariat was thrown.

The aim was true, for the noose settled squarely about the body of the rancher and he was dragged backward to the ground, with as little force as would throw him.

Ere he could rise Buffalo Bill had leaped to his side, and, extending his hand, cried:

"Why, it is you, my old friend, Manton Marr! I made a mistake; but then, you are the man I came to find, for I am here at your bidding, in answer to your letter. You have not forgotten Buffalo Bill."

The rancher sat upon the ground, making no attempt to rise. He seemed dazed, as though trying to recall his scattered senses.

At last he said, sadly:

"Yes, you are my old friend, Buffalo Bill, and you came at my call, too, but you came too late to save my child, my darling Helen."

"Not so, my friend. Your child is safe in my keeping, having escaped the trap set for you all by the outlaws."

The man rose to his feet, and, facing the scout, placed both hands upon his shoulders, while he said, plaintively, yet with terrible earnestness:

"Buffalo Bill, would you lie to me and say that my Helen lives, when I know she is dead?"

"I have searched for her body everywhere; and see—I am digging her grave."

"I tell you, Manton Marr, it is you, not I, that is mistaken. I left your daughter this very morning, safe and well in my camp, while I came here to search for you."

"I have friends with me—Revenge Rangers they call themselves—and they are sworn to avenge their wrongs, and yours, also."

"Listen to me, pard, while I tell you how I met her, lost her, and again found your Helen, and then you will understand all."

"You have suffered, but your brain will soon be cleared, for you have at least not your daughter to sorrow for."

In his quiet way Buffalo Bill went on to tell his story. The amazed man listened. His brain was cleared as by a cloud-lift, and, as the narrative proceeded, he covered his face with his hands and sobbed aloud.

Buffalo Bill gave a signal for the others to advance, and the greeting that Manton Marr gave Buckskin Sam, and the two rangers, whom he knew, showed that he was no longer distracted and demented with grief.

Without even glancing at the half-dug grave he said:

"Come, my friends, I have been in a troubled dream, how long God only knows."

"I now must tell you that my good wife and my two faithful servants are in hiding not far away."

"When I built my cabin I found an underground passage or cavern. It led from the cellar to the cliff, and in that way, after the two faithful cowboys, who aided me in defending my home, were killed, we escaped and came to the re-

treat near here, and which I found one day, while hunting.

"I supposed that Helen had been captured by the outlaws, for we saw her dash up while the cabin was burning, and she was fired upon by the demons.

"I believe the shock almost crazed me; but my wife will be happy now, as I am."

Then he led the way to his retreat.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE SECRET OUT.

The retreat was found, and Mrs. Marr, and the negro man and woman were with her. All rapturously rejoiced to see the rancher return with his brain no longer clouded, and they welcomed the scout and his comrades most cordially.

They had food in plenty, brought with them from the cellar of the cabin, and with Mrs. Marr and the negro woman mounted upon the horses of two of the Revenge Rangers, the march was taken up for the camp of the Revenge Rangers, for Buffalo Bill was determined to take no chances of leaving the fugitives in their retreat. He wanted them where there would be force enough to defend them.

The sun was just rising when he rode ahead into the camp, and he saw Helen up and getting breakfast for the men.

Instantly she came toward him, and he told her that he had not only found her father, but her mother as well, and the faithful negro servants, so that two of the cowboys alone had perished in the cabin.

On his way back Buffalo Bill had decided that it was best to first break the happy news to the girl, so that the shock of joy might not be too great for her to bear, and when he saw how overcome she was, he was glad that he had done so.

But, she soon rallied, and was ready to welcome the others when they rode into camp.

The meeting under such circumstances can be imagined, but not described, and a happy party sat down to the camp breakfast, which the negress soon had ready for all.

Buffalo Bill found in camp the three rangers sent in search of Helen Marr. They had found her little camp in the hills and had trailed the party from there.

The two men sent to watch the movements at the hacienda had returned, also, and reported that they had seen seven horsemen ride away from the Redwood Ranch the evening before, and had tracked them to the mountains.

Then they had come back to make their report, for the men had put on the garb of the Black Brotherhood, after getting well away from the hacienda, and so they deemed it best to remain no longer on watch, but come and let their chief know what they had discovered.

"You have done right, boys. They were bound to their mountain camp, where Miss Marr was a prisoner, and you say there were seven?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she says that she left eight men and the Mexican girl in the camp, but five of those pursued her, so are accounted for by those graves yonder.

"The three left in camp, and the seven you saw go there, make ten, and there may be a few more outside, for you know they must keep up their fatal number of thirteen by the reserves they must have.

"We now number, with Buckskin Sam, Rancher Marr, and the negro, just sixteen men and we take up the march to-night for that cabin, for Miss Helen can guide us there, once I put her upon the trail she came in her escape.

"I will rest until noon, and then start ahead, with Buckskin Sam following. The rest of the party can follow, so as to strike the mountain trail by sunset.

"Then we ask no more."

This arrangement was carried out, Buffalo Bill getting a much-needed rest,

as also did Buckskin Sam, and their horses as well.

After dinner the chief started upon the trail.

With the horses of the five outlaws, Rancher Marr, his wife, and the two negroes were mounted, and there was an animal left to carry the camp outfit.

The rangers started out upon the trail of their chief in time to allow them to reach the mountain trail by sunset, and strong enough in force to defy the Black Brotherhood, should they even muster the Fatal Thirteen in number.

When Buffalo Bill had gone along a mile or so with Buckskin Sam, he remarked:

"Well, Sam, it looks as though it was just what we should do, to take the Revenge Rangers as our allies."

"Yes; you always seem to hit it right, Pard Cody!"

"Well, I do begin to feel as though we had the Black Brotherhood by the hip."

"It looks so."

"Yes, and as though the wind-up was not far off. If we catch the gang in camp we'll have them, and if there are others at large we can round them up in short order, for some fellow will talk if his life is to be the stake."

"You bet he will."

"But we must get that unknown chief, or all the work will have to be done over again in time, for he has certainly proven himself a very clever general, though an inhuman devil."

"Yes, but we'll catch him."

"You seem certain."

"I am, for I rely upon one who promised to aid me in the end."

"Miss Redwood?"

"Yes."

"Is it not strange that she has not been again to camp?"

"No, for she may have been watched, and knows it. She is awful clever, you know."

"Yes; but I cannot make her out."

"There is where I have the advantage. I can make her out."

"You know her, then, you think?"

"I know both of them."

"Both of whom?"

"Miss Redwood and the other girl."

"I'm all in the dark."

"Sam, Miss Redwood has two unmaimed hands, while the other girl has lost the thumb of her left hand."

"Great God!"

"It is true; they are two, not one and the same."

"I am going to find out the girl with the thumbless left hand, now."

CHAPTER LXVII.

RIGHTING A WRONG.

As on their other trail, when the two scouts had progressed well on the way, Buckskin Sam dropped back behind Buffalo Bill as his shadower.

On went the leader for miles, until he drew rein near the ridge where the Mexican had been shot by a foe in the rear.

Buffalo Bill was now very cautious, so he did not ride over the ridge.

He made a reconnoissance first, for he was aware that he could see a mile down the canyon from the top of the ridge.

Leaving his horse hidden in a thicket, he crept up to a pine on one side of the ridge, and peered over.

It was well that he did so. He could see a long distance down the canyon, and his eyes fell upon a flight and a chase.

It was a horsewoman flying from a horseman.

The woman, he knew, must be Miss Redwood, as she was considered; the pursuer was a Man in Black.

The chances were apparently with the man, for he was the better mounted and gaining.

Buffalo Bill thought quickly.

He would let them pass him, thus placing the outlaw between himself and Buckskin Sam.

He remembered that for a couple of

miles the trail from the ridge ran through a cut in the mountains, the sides too steep to allow a horse to leave it—which was what he now wanted.

He saw, too, that the pursued and pursuer must soon go slow, for they could not ride rapidly up the rise to the ridge.

Just before reaching the top there was a sharp climb of thirty feet.

If the man did not catch his victim there, he would let him pass him and then follow, calling out to the girl, if he could do so, that he was on hand to aid her.

He looked to his weapons then, and waited.

The girl rode more slowly as she reached the bad footing, and the man then gained rapidly until he got within a hundred yards of her.

But, he, too, had to go slow there, and thus they came on.

The girl neared the ridge; then came a shot, and her horse fell.

Her skirt was pinned beneath the animal, and at first Buffalo Bill had believed her hurt, while, in her fall, a revolver she held in her hand had been hurled beyond her reach.

Violently struggling to free herself, she did so just as the man had leaped from his horse and approached her.

But, as she rose and faced him, he staggered back and cried:

"My God! you are not Helen Marr, but—"

He stopped suddenly, while she said, sternly:

"No, I am not Helen Marr, as you believed, the captive who escaped you, but—"

She, too, paused at the word "but."

He then spoke again, and the scout, not thirty feet away, heard each word uttered.

"I thought you were one we deemed dead, and, as you are not, you can go your way to your home, for I wish no harm to you, Miss Rena Redwood.

"I will meet you here, later, with a horse for you to ride."

"You will remain here now, sir."

"What?"

"Do you believe that the grave gives up its dead?"

"What in Heaven's name do you mean?"

"Whose deed was that?"

She had pulled her left glove off as she spoke, and held up her thumbless hand!

The man reeled backward, covered his face with his hands, and in sheer faintness, his knees gave way and he fell.

In an instant she had leaped forward and snatched off his mask.

"Do I not know you, Rupert Redwood? Have I not cause to do so? Have I forgotten that when I became your wife you believed that I, not my twin sister, Rena, had been left the fortune you sought to get? and finding your mistake, do I not know that you brought me to this wild land to kill me?"

"This is the hand you left when you aimed the knife at my heart, but severed my thumb; and I received another blow, over the heart, that left its scar.

"But, neither killed me, for I owe my life to an old Mexican woman with whom I have since lived.

"Hold! You shall hear, and if you move an inch I shall kill you, for see, I have another weapon here!"

"Believing that you had killed me, you went back and won my poor sister. You brought her to that old mission ranch, with part of her inheritance from the gentleman who owed his life to my father, and who, dying, left his fortune to his daughter, he not knowing that he had two.

"It was decided that it was for Rena, for he had only seen her.

"You found the fortune was not so large as you had believed, so you brought her here, and forced her to say she was your sister.

"You told her that, if not known to be married, you would one day get a fortune.

"In the meanwhile you knew that one, a Mexican girl who loved you, would expose you, did she know that Rena was your wife.

"That girl is the daughter of the woman who cared for me, and now she knows you as you are, for I have told her all.

"Her daughter is in your mountain retreat, for I know you as the Ranchero Bandit, the leader of the Black Brotherhood.

"I know that you were plotting to get rid of that Mexican girl, to also get rid of my sister, Rena, that you might marry Helen Marr and get the fortune in gold her father has hidden away.

"But, she unmasked your intended villainy, and then you sought your revenge, to hush her tongue forever, hoping that you would find her father's gold in the ashes of her home.

"She escaped you, and you sought to kill her; but that Mexican girl aided her escape.

"There is no escape for you, Rupert Redwood, for there is one upon your track from whom you cannot escape, and that one is Buffalo Bill."

"Buffalo Bill is here!"

With the words a lasso settled over the head of the Bandit Rancher, and he was dragged violently down upon his face.

He rose, pistol in hand, and there were fired two quick shots.

Rupert Redwood fired one.

The other was fired by Buffalo Bill.

The bandit leader 'ropped dead.

"That was the worst act of my life, to fire that shot and thus cheat the galls of that man's neck.

"But, his aim was at you, not me, and I had barely time to save you by the shot," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

NEARING THE END.

Buckskin Sam arrived upon the scene as the shots were fired.

He then had the story told to him, and heard the woman tell how she had not, on her sister's account, wished to be the one to bring the man to his doom, but intended to do so, if no one else did.

As her sister believed her to be dead, and the man was dead, she would now have Buffalo Bill go to her and tell the whole sad and pitiful story.

But first, she would go to her own retreat, and as Buffalo Bill told her of Helen Marr's escape, and that she would be along later, she said that she would take all back with her, while the Mexican woman, who knew the outlaw's camp, being in secret communication with her daughter there, would guide the Revenge Rangers to it.

"Remember, Mr. Cody," she continued, "the poor Mexican girl who is there is no outlaw, only forced by her love for that wretched man lying dead at our feet to remain there—doing so for revenge now, for her love turned to hatred when, several days ago, her mother told her my story of wrong and sorrow.

"She, the mother, will guide you to the retreat to-night, and the girl there knows each one of the outlaw band, so can tell you where to find those not caught there."

Buffalo Bill then told how he had feared, from some cause he could not explain, to trust Rupert Redwood, and so never had made a confidant of him.

He had also discovered, through papers found on the body of Pedro Garcia, the name of Rupert Redwood and the hacienda mentioned, but not reading Spanish, he had kept them for future reference, yet they increased his suspicion that the man knew more of the Black Brotherhood than he admitted.

The scout also told how, upon his last visit to the hacienda, he had begun to suspect that Rena Redwood was not the one who was his ally, and at supper he had discovered that she had no maimed hand, which was convincing proof.

Thus had all suspicions been verified, and the whole truth had come out of what had at first seemed baffling.

As Rita Redwood—as she called herself, her maiden name having been Rita Royal—said that her retreat was not two miles away, Buffalo Bill said that he would strap the dead bandit leader upon his horse, while she could mount behind him, on his own horse, and they would go on there. At the same time Buckskin Sam was to ride rapidly back over the trail, to hasten on the Revenge Rangers party.

"You cannot pass down the canyon without our seeing you, sir, so we will not miss you," Rita Redwood had said.

The Scout in Green then rode rapidly away, and soon after Buffalo Bill, with the woman mounted behind him, and the bandit's horse in lead, with the body strapped across the saddle, started for the retreat in the canyon.

When he saw how cleverly it was located, Buffalo Bill did not wonder that no one had ever suspected its existence.

But the Mexican woman and her husband had sought the place to be near their daughter. The man had been one of the outlaw band, but had been killed a year before his wife had found Rita Redwood almost dying by the side of the trail and had carried her to her home.

Believing he had killed her, Rupert Redwood had left her body to be devoured by coyotes and thus cover up his crime.

It was a comfortable cabin that Buffalo Bill found, and the Mexican woman greeted him pleasantly, and said:

"My husband is gone, my daughter is avenged by your hand, senor, and can now live in peace with me, while the Senorita Rena, here, will go to her sister and be content, if not happy.

"Yes, senor, when your men come along, give me a horse to ride, and I will guide you to the retreat of the Black Brotherhood.

"They did number forty men, and not one knew who their leader really was.

"But a number have been killed within the past week or so, and you will find about half that number in camp.

"If all are not there my daughter will know, so those who escape to-night will be doomed to-morrow.

"Yes, great senor, I will guide you, and this accursed band will cease to exist.

"You have done more, senor, in a week's time, than have the many who have hunted the Black Brotherhood for years.

"They have made many graves, destroyed many happy homes, have been merciless to man and woman and child alike, but you have avenged the wrongs of many, senor, and Heaven will bless you, senor."

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONCLUSION.

The Revenge Rangers came along rapidly, after being met by Buckskin Sam and told the news.

Buffalo Bill met them in the canyon and guided them to the retreat of the Mexican woman.

There a good supper was had, and leaving Mrs. Marr, Helen, Rita, and the negro at the retreat, Buffalo Bill, with sixteen all told and the Mexican woman as guide, started for the camp of the Black Brotherhood.

But why dwell upon another scene of carnage?

It was a complete surprise and almost a wipe out of existence of the Brotherhood, for it was "council night," and every man of the band save a few spies was present.

A few prisoners, wounded and unwounded, were taken. Buckskin Sam and several of the Rangers were wounded, while three of the latter were killed.

Much booty was secured, but when the Revenge Rangers started upon their

retreat the Mexican woman and her daughter were not to be found.

Three of the best horsemen were missing, and the mother and daughter had gone, carrying with them the band's treasure, which the girl knew the hiding-place of.

"Let them go; they deserve it," said Buffalo Bill, and no one disputed his decision.

Arriving at the Mexican woman's retreat, it was found that she had prepared not to return.

All went into camp, and Buffalo Bill started for Hacienda Redwood, while Rancher Marr followed with the wronged wife.

The scout told his story, and he was glad to see that, in spite of the terrible shock, that the joy of her sister's being alive counteracted the grief of what she now knew Robert Redwood to have been, and, in fact, she had long suspected him of lawless acts, and the fact that he made her pass as his sister and other deeds he was guilty of had caused her to lose every atom of love for him.

The meeting of the sisters need not be dwelt upon, and both of them insisted that the Marrs should dwell with them until the rancher rebuilt his home, and this was decided upon.

Back then to Verde—went Buffalo Bill with his party, and Colonel Garrett said when the story was told:

"I take off my hat, Cody, to you, for you are most surely the King of Bordermen, and now this land will be one of peace."

Back to his duties in the Northwest went Buffalo Bill, and his Revenge Rangers were employed by Manton Marr to first rebuild his home and then become his cattlemen.

Van Soulsby and his Regulators found that a traitor in their midst led them on wrong trails each time, but they still remained a company of rangers for home guard, and the young captain won the heart and hand of sweet Helen Marr, and was happy.

As for the two sisters, they still dwell upon their ranch, and no man could ever win their love, but many a poor fellow blessed them for their kind acts to all who were in distress, and to-day they are known to the people about them as the "Sister Saints of the Old Mission."

To-day, a hero of world-wide fame, distinguished, rich, the last type of the grand men of the frontier, Buffalo Bill lives in remembrance of the strange past that was his, and among the most vivid of its memories his trail with the Revenge Rangers of Arizona stands out most vividly.

THE END.

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